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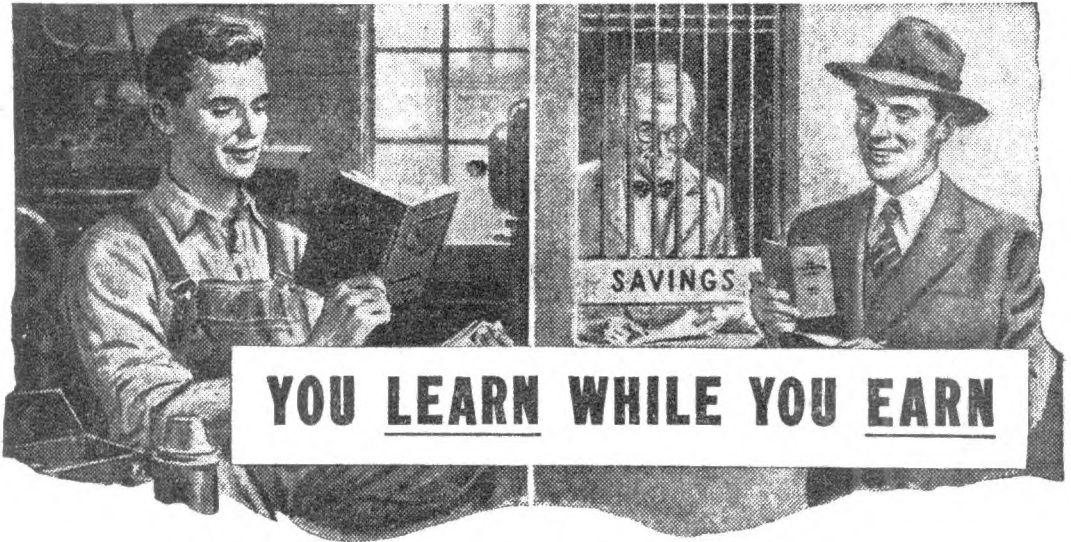
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Front cover painting by James B. Settles, illustrating a scene
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All Stories Complete

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The Editor's Page.....

THE response to Richard S. Shaver's, "The Loot of Babylon," in the last issue of *Mammoth Adventure*, was overwhelming. Apparently (for once) your editor's judgment coincided with his readers' tastes, because every single letter that we received praised the story. We knew we had something the minute we read it and so did you. Naturally we had to follow it up with another of the same caliber. On page 128 of this issue is another historical novel of the same breathtaking type. While the setting is radically different—it's the Central America of Cortez' time—the action and the characterization are of the same thrilling type. We're going to try and give you more Shaver material just as soon as we can get it. Unfortunately for us, he has been pretty busily tied up with our companion magazines, *Fantastic Adventures* and *Amazing Stories*. His stuff is in demand and we have to do a bit of scrounging around to get him going on adventure material.

DRAKE WILLIAMS and Warren Geiger have concocted a beautifully-done story in "English Steel and Spanish Passion." They've introduced a new character in these pages, "Captain Edward Terror," who's a holy terror if there ever was one. It's a story of the lusty privateering days of the Spanish Main when it wasn't safe for a Spanish ship to cross the Caribbean without an escort of fifty ships to guard against the fearless pirate craft that preyed on them. As you read it, you'll smell powder smoke and hear the clash of pike against cutlass, the ring of steel blades on armor—and the cheers of fighting men!

"IT STARTED in Chicago," by Berkeley Livingston, brings us once again into contact with the most unpleasant creatures that ever walked the Earth—the Nazis. You've probably noticed in the newspapers and magazines, articles on their renewed activity both in South America and in Europe. "Berk" has knocked out a thrilling little job about what presumably they've been doing in South America. It would surprise no one to learn that there is more truth than fiction in it, least of all, Berk. Uranium forms the biggest pot ever played for in the international poker game of politics. Read this clever expose!

IT'S NOT our usual policy to concentrate on a single locale, but we've run into another story with a South American setting—one that's got a real punch. "Andean Adventure," by Lester Barclay, is an unusual story in that it mixes up a lot of elements that you ordinarily don't find together. And Maria Cordoba is a girl to keep your eye on. We're sure you'll like this.

WE'RE running into a lot of trouble these days, trying to find out what makes an adventure story! We are told that some of the most exciting adventures occur in the laboratories and shops of modern industry. And from what we know of the atomic bomb, radar, jets, and rockets, this must be true. What we're particularly interested in is this business of rockets. Our companion magazine *Amazing Stories* has run many a tale of a trip to the Moon, the same kind of a trip that everyone in the United States knows is going to be made soon. With the Army experimenting with V-2's at White Sands, New Mexico, it isn't going to be long before Man's most thrilling adventure story will be written *in fact*. The thousand tales of polar and jungle exploration will pale into insignificance before a journey into space to our nearest neighbor. Keep your eye peeled on your favorite adventure magazine because one of these days as an experiment of our own we're going to run a short story on just such a trip. We'd better calm down. The thought of the thing is exciting enough!

WHEN your editor was making up this month's issue of *Mammoth Adventure*, he was invited into the art department to see the unveiling of the cover for the magazine. Frankly, we were nearly bowled over by the sight of that ship that graces this month's cover. We think that it is the finest piece of marine work that we've ever seen. And we're sure you'll feel the same way about it. Historically and technically, that ship is accurate down to the last marlinspike. While we know that it isn't the artwork that makes a magazine, from what you have written in, it's clear that good illustrations help! James B. Settles who did the ship, is noted for his extreme care and accuracy. He will paint nothing until he's satisfied that it is absolutely perfect. That's the attitude our writers as well as our artists all have, and you can see the result it produces. Let us know what you think of it.

WELL, that winds up the issue for this month. We can promise you another group of exciting, interesting stories for next month, done by the same bunch of top-notch authors that we've been using, plus some fine new ones. There is one story in particular which we think will be a rare treat. It's "Sword Over Islam," by Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, and it has the master's touch. We've also got a sports-adventure story on the fire and from what you fellows have said in your letters, we think it'll go over big. Incidentally, keep those letters coming, and give us your opinion on whether or not you'd like to see a "letter section" in MA. See you . . . RAP

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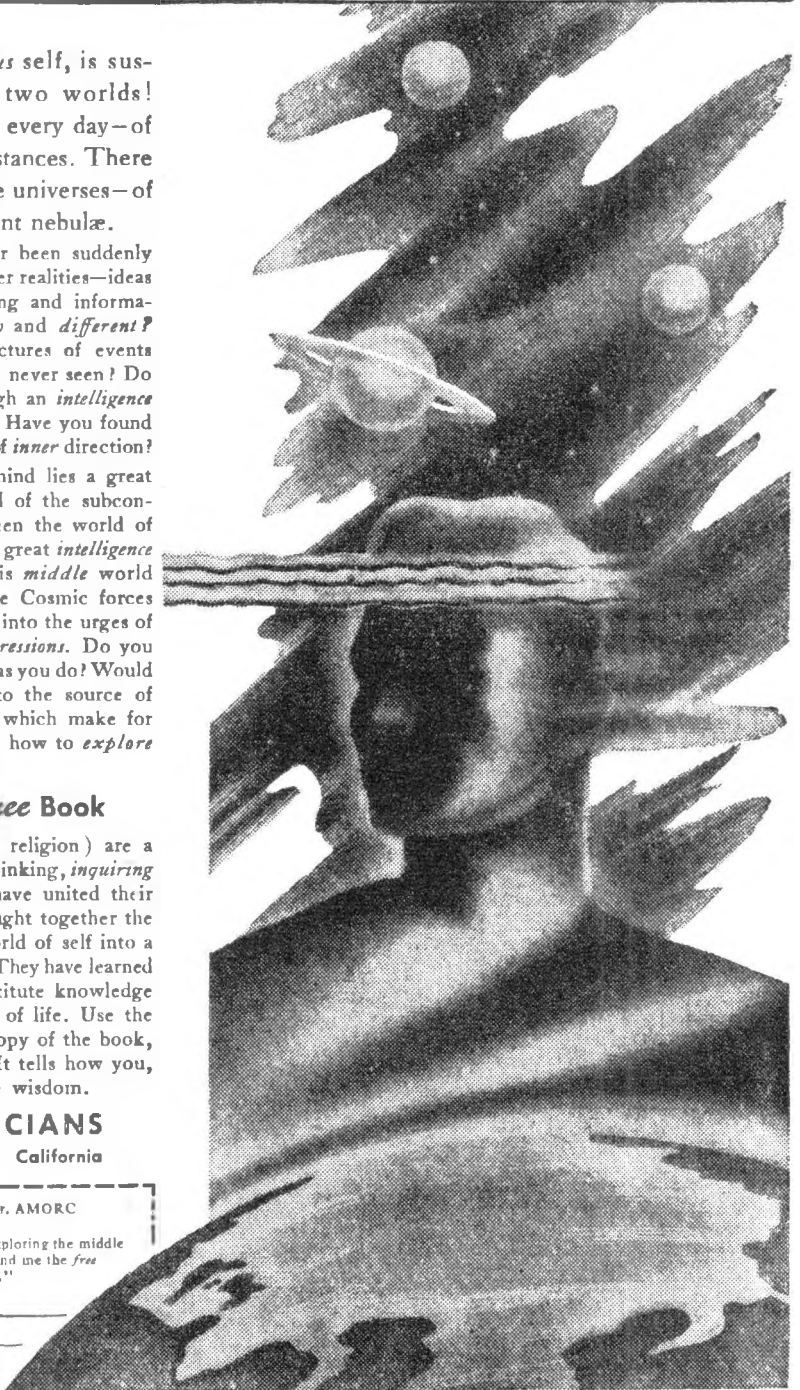
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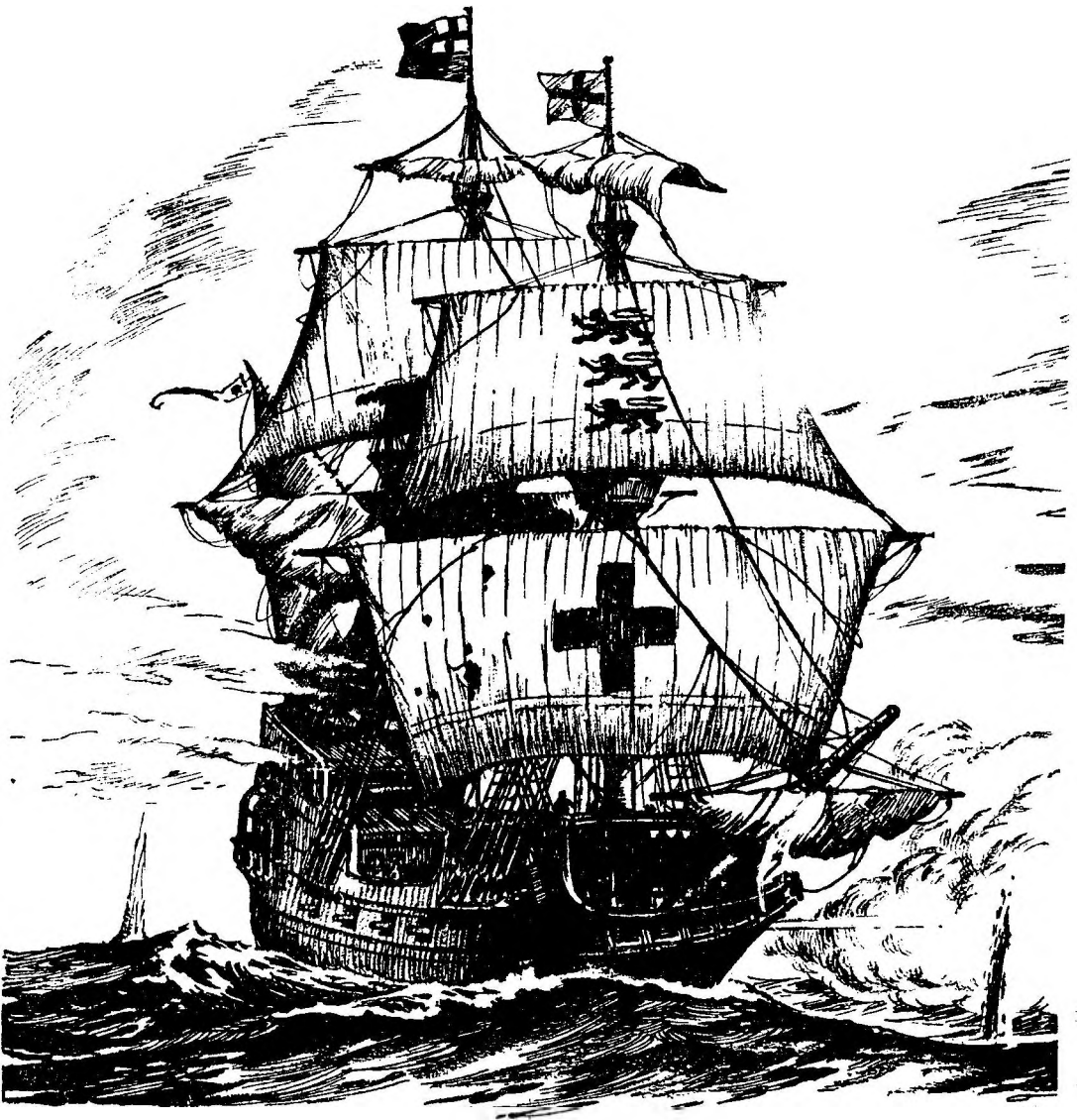
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ENGLISH STEEL and

by Drake Williams and Warren Geiger

*Don Alvarez de Perona de Sadista, thought the Spanish
Main a Spanish lake until he met Terror's English steel!*



SPANISH PASSION

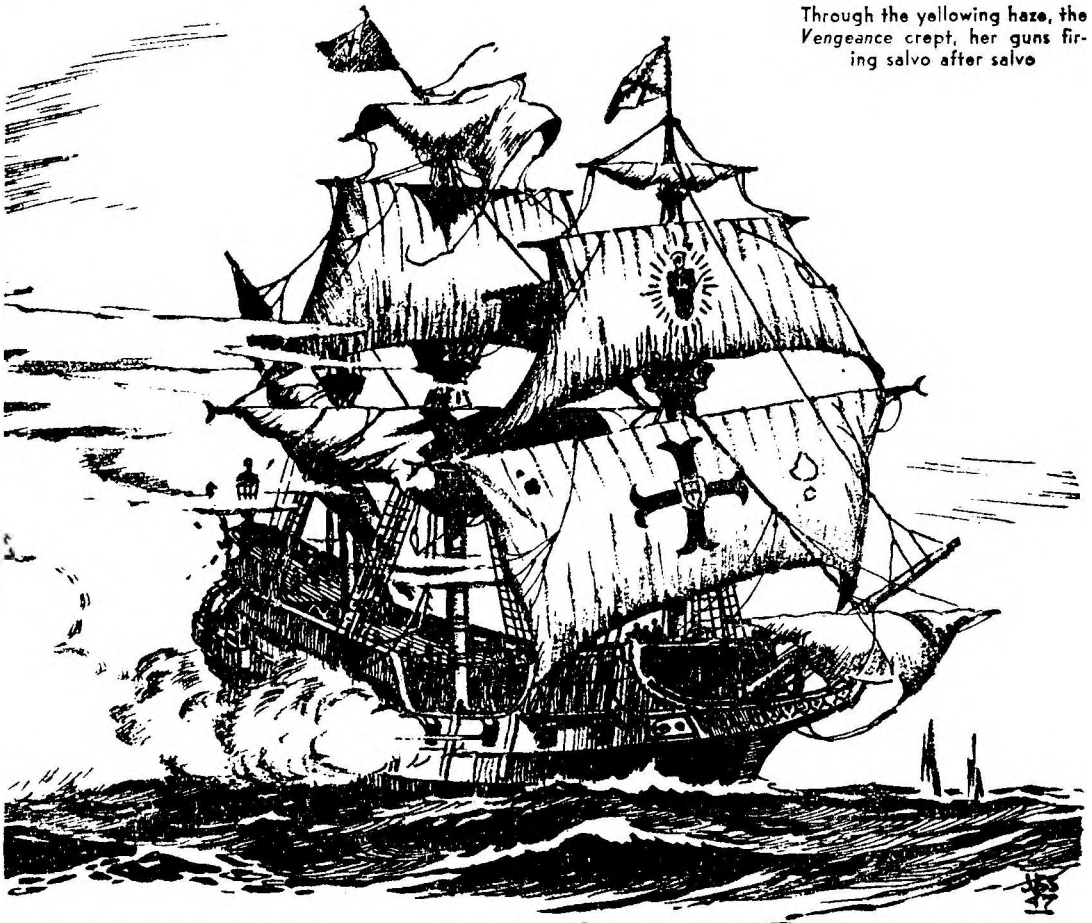
THE gods frowned as Edward Terror and the Maid of Avon beat through the Mona Passage off the green land mass that was Hispaniola. The sea was sparkling blue and the sky was azure as the little Dutch-built merchantman bowled merrily over the waves. Her hold was fat with spices and cane and her destination was home, Cardiff, Wales.

"Aye, Duggley, a few more weeks

and we'll be back home for good." With satisfaction in his black eyes and a smile on his tanned face, the master of the Maid of Avon spoke to his Somersetshire navigator.

"We've all made enough to settle us for life and live like barons, Edward," the massive, muscular navigator replied. "Although, to be truthful with you, I'm going to miss the tang of the sea and the good fortune that always

Through the yellowing haze, the *Vengeance* crept, her guns firing salvo after salvo



seemed to be yours."

"We have been lucky in our voyages and now all that we need is for Lady Luck to hold with us across the Atlantic and, Duggley, we'll have never a need to press her again."

At that moment, from a stripe-shirted seaman high in the rigging there came a hail.

"Sail ho, three points off the starboard bow!"

The tall, lean figure of Edward Terror straightened up from its recline against the taffrail. From the side pocket of his greatcoat, a thing of beauty in silver and blue, he withdrew a glass and mounted the mizzenmast ratlines. Hand-over-hand, he scrambled up the hemp to the crosstrees and slapped the eyepiece open. Bearing down upon them under a mighty press of sail was a large three-master. By her cut, and not by her ensign for she showed none, the Welshman saw that she was of Spanish build and her open gunports revealed sixteen cannon to a flank.

"I don't like her looks, Duggley," Edward said as he leaped to the poop deck. His heavy black brows were knit in thought as he slipped off his coat and flung it to one of his men. "She flies no flag and her gunports are open. These are pirate waters so let's clear for action until we can better understand her motive in bearing down upon us so."

In a trice the Maid of Avon was cleared of gear on her upper two decks and her puny armament of ten demiculverines was run out. Cutlasses and pistols were readied on the quarterdeck and the equipage of the guncrews, rams, powder, balls, buckets, and fuses, was placed by the open ports.

"She's got the weather gauge of us, Edward," the blonde Duggley noted to his captain. "And, by the great bear,

I believe she means us foul play."

Edward glanced at the rippling Cross of St. George flying at his own gaff and wondered what manner of foe this stranger on the seas could be. It would do him no good to flee because it was evident that the mighty scarlet stranger was more fleet of sail than his smaller vessel. Bought at Plymouth, the Maid of Avon was a captured prize from the great battle at Texel in 1653. She was fine for trade but even the renowned Dutch Admiral De Ruyter could never have made of her a formidable or speedy man-of-war. He must trust to luck and hope for the best.

"There's a flag running up her main-truck," the clear call of the lookout shrilled forth. "She's Spanish!"

There brazenly slapping in the easterly breeze was the red and yellow banner of Castile. At that very moment a cotton-like puff of white blossomed from the Spaniard's bow and later the clap of a cannon shot carried across the rippled skin of the sea as a ball plummeted into the water beneath the Englishman's bowsprit and kicked up a miniature waterspout.

"The dog!"

Knowing her now for what she was, the temper of Edward Terror burnt red hot. He knew that Charles II of Spain felt that the Caribbean was, by Divine Right, the sole property of Spain; he also knew that any lone Englishman was fair bait for the greed of these pompous scavengers of the Main. But why, in God's name, should he, of all men, have to find himself target for these cruel hounds of the sea just when his whole future seemed assured? Blast their parents' passion, he could choose no other course but to fight and that might end eventually in defeat and destruction.

"Bring her more to starboard, Duggley," he shouted above the creak of

the rigging and the pounding of the seas. "Lay her as close-hauled as possible on a line with that Spanish dog's bowsprit."

The Maid of Avon heeled around with her port flank deep in the rolling blue waves and with her yardarms almost parallel with her keel line. She bore straight as an arrow for the approaching foe.

"What do you intend, Edward?" The perplexed Duggley asked as he placed twin pistols in his greatbelt and thrust a vicious looking cutlass into his baldric.

"Nothing more than bravado, old fella. It might serve to confuse their slow witted Castillian minds and give us a fair break to make a run for it if we can weather their first broadside."

When the powerful thirty-two gun foe swung around, as she must eventually do to bring her guns to bear, Edward Terror could then change his course to suit Fortune and, mayhap, break away before the Spaniard could again pick up speed. It was a long dangerous chance—but chance it was.

THE foam piled up at the bows of the two approaching vessels and then bubbled and trailed away on their flanks. The white wakes thus formed appeared to the wheeling hurricane birds overhead like unto twin arrows approaching one another. Inexorably the two mountains of sail pounded closer and closer. The masts and white expanse of her sheets grew enormous as the scarlet ship of Spain drew near. Her ratlines and foredeck were crowded with the corseleted figures of a numerous crew and the black snouts of cannon jutted ominously forth from the scroll work on her flanks.

"By the saints, Edward," Duggley exclaimed aghast. "The knave flies the pennant of the Vice-Admiral of the

Caribbean Squadron!"

Indeed it was true and served to add fuel to the fires of hate that burned in the hot-tempered Welsh captain's mind. There, at her foremast tip, the sword and dragon of the Spanish West Indian Squadron Vice-Admiral flowed. It was a pennant whose import could well mean war between Spain and England if ever report of this coming action were received in the British Admiralty. It meant too that the Spaniard figured the battle as well as won and the English heretics already put to the sword.

"Duggley, this is as fine a sample of Spanish treachery as you're apt to ever see."

At last the Spaniard heeled around to starboard and the long gleaming line of her cannon revealed themselves yawning hungrily toward the smaller Maid of Avon. Then, with a thunderous crash, her flank erupted in orange flame and billowing white clouds of smoke. The Maid of Avon shuddered in every timber from the broadside. Ratlines parted, red swathes of destruction swirled across her decks and Edward Terror was dashed against a capstan.

As he arose, his left arm limp and bleeding at his side, he realized that all opportunity for escape was gone. The Maid of Avon shuddered to a stop upon the seas that were now turning lavender in the rays of the setting sun. Her mainmast had crashed to the deck and her waist was a mass of broken spars and tangled cordage.

"Fire!"

He heard Duggley's command ring out and then came the answer, a paltry coughing of four demi-culverins. As he stumbled across the mangled bodies of several of his crew and the ripped and scarred boards, a sudden thought occurred to him. The swine of Castile would never board his ship alive. Into the hold he raced, a demonic looking

son of battle.

In the powder magazine he planted a long trailing fuse and ran it up to the poop deck hatch combing. There he passed it through and soon came from below himself. His board brimmed hat had been torn from his black head and his long curling hair flowed in the breeze as, hunched over and with right hand on rapier, he shouted for Duggley.

"I've run a fuse to the powder magazine and mean to blast the Maid of Avon to kingdom come before yonder Hell's children can ever board her."

The grim faced and soot-smeared Somersetshireman was taken aback.

"Aye, Edward, but what of us?"

"We'll take to the longboat—what's left of us—and put our faith in the open sea rather than in the Spaniard's evil heart." He waved his hand toward the red ball of the setting sun. "Night will be upon us in a matter of minutes and, mayhap, we can make an island hereabouts afore the Spaniard can overtake us."

DUGGLEY went to prepare the longboat on the starboard side away from the prying eyes of the foe and the one-sided battle thundered on. The great Spaniard had come up again on a different tack through the dispersing smoke and was presenting her unfired starboard guns for the coup-de-grace. This puny English heretic would get a second dose of Hell for his impudence in not surrendering to the Vice-Admiral of the Caribbean Squadron, Don Alvarez de Perona de Sadista. Then would come the boarding and each and every surviving English dog would feel the cold blade of the sword upon his neck. There should be some valuable cargo and, mayhap, some gold or other treasure aboard.

Night was falling fast as it is wont to

do in the Indies when the San Nicolas, for that was the name of the scarlet Spaniard, bore in for another rain of lead. Duggley and Edward Terror could see her rails packed with grinning faces and could hear the vile mouthings and insults of the enemy's crew through the shattered larboard rail and bulwarks. The demi-culverins fired first and it was with glee that the men of the Maid of Avon saw a gunport below decks burst into livid flame and death. Then a great rolling roar swallowed every other sound in its enormity and four hundred pounds of lead tore into the shattered Englishman. Both the mizzen and the fore masts came rattling down with a tearing of sails and snapping of ropes. There were screams as more of Edward Terror's men fell to the reddened decks and the rolling clouds of smoke from the enemy's broadside swept and swirled around the stricken vessel.

"Edward, your chest," Duggley coughed through the smoke as he pointed to the Welshman's breast.

A Spanish ball had slashed across his front and left a raw gash six inches wide from nipple to nipple. The navigator hastily bound the bleeding chest with a huge strip of torn sail cloth and helped the begrimed merchant captain to his feet.

"I'll be all right, Duggley," he said as he arose, his face twisted in pain. "If the longboat's ready, let's set the fuse and be away. It's dark enough and those scum will soon be back to board."

The remainder of the crew, eight men, joined Duggley and their captain. Duggley lit the fuse at the poop deck hatch and the ten Englishmen slid down the ropes to the waiting and bobbing longboat. The skies were now black but the flames from the Maid of Avon's fires lighted the sea for many yards around. The powder-begrimed men

in their tattered clothing, burdened with bandaged heads, arms and legs, pushed off from the hull of the once proud merchantman.

"Put up the sail, Gallat," the huge, blonde Duggley ordered as Edward Terror, wracked with pain from his torn left arm and bloody chest, lay silently in the sternsheets. "For the present, let's only try to keep the Maid of Avon between us and that Spanish hellhound. Once we're away in the night, we'll set our course by the stars for Puerto Rico. There should be some islands in that direction."

Meanwhile, the Spaniard had turned once again and was drawing alongside the shattered and burning hulk. She hove to at a safe distance and launched some cockboats with picked crews to board the vanquished Englishman. Although all was silent from the riddled merchantman but the crackling of her fires, the Spaniards were wary, for these Englishmen might still have strength enough to lay in wait for a bitter boarding fight with cutlass, pistol and pike. As the foe approached in the fire red-dened night, aboard the ravaged Maid of Avon a slender powder train burned onward creeping slowly and steadily toward the end.

AT LAST the cockboats banged into the sides of the burning vessel and the steel jacketed soldiers of Spain, led by a young captain, scrambled up the sides that were tattered and splintered from their own metal. As they crawled over the railing onto the waist deck they were tense and held their weapons at the ready. All that met their gaze was the ruin and the wreckage of spars and sails, the twisted and contorted bodies of the dead and, by some freak of battle, the shattered gaff standing from amidst the wreckage and ruin with her cocky flag, the red and white

Cross of St. George, impudently waving in their faces.

"Virgin Santisima!" The young captain of Castile screamed—but too late.

A great roaring gust of flame leaped skyward and tore the entire stern—works heavenward with it. The very bowels of the ship burst upward and enormous blasts of heat and flame and rubble exploded outward and over the sea. The powder magazine had gone off.

As the great explosion lit the night sky and reflected in shimmering lines from the water in yellow, orange and red streaks, Edward Terror pulled himself up over the gunwales of the Maid of Avon's longboat. With a twisted pain-wracked smile on his blood and sweat-encrusted face, he shook his fist toward the flames and cried forth in hate.

"Carrion of Spain, let that be your first taste of terror. For, by the carnal devils of Stonehedge, I'll make you pay for this night's doings and sink my name into your hearts if I have to trail you to Panama."

THE longboat and her crew of survivors escaped into the darkness of the night as the light of the explosion died down and the remains of the Maid of Avon slid beneath the waves. Taking his bearings from the stars, Duggley headed due east into a heavy breeze. The little boat heaved and bucked on the running seas and there was not much comfort for any of the men.

With the coming of the dawn the crew was tense for the Spanish man-of-war might still be in the vicinity; in which case there would be a speedy end to their sufferings, for the Vice-Admiral would not care to have a report of his part in the affair come before the British Admiralty. The golden yellow light of the new day revealed an empty sea and they were alone with the blue-green

rollers and the squawking gulls overhead.

"How did the men fare during the dark hours, Duggley?" Edward Terror questioned.

"Well enough," the muscular navigator answered as he attended to the raw reddish gash on his captain's chest. "We've got water and biscuit enough for a few days. With those gulls overhead as an indication, land must be near."

"If the breeze holds, we should sight a landfall before another twenty-four hours."

All through the day the longboat painfully bowled her way over the pitching seas. The sun beat down unmercifully on the men and the sea-spray added its salty sting to their sufferings.

"Land! Land! I can see it faintly in the distance on each rise of the boat." The keen eyes of the young seaman named Gallat at length caught a glimpse of what they all had been waiting for.

"Aye, you're right, lad," the broad face of Duggley beamed as he stood up at his position by the tiller. "Night-fall will find us safe ashore."

It was a small island but, none the less, to them a green jewel of beauty sitting amidst the blue rollers of the Caribbean. As the longboat, her occupants filled with anticipation and exhilaration, piled through the ring of thundering combers and hissing foam-specked breakers, they saw a shimmering golden beach stretching back to a veritable cliff of tropical vegetation.

The longboat grooved her way into the wet sand's edge and the crew leaped out. Edward Terror, his arm limp and swollen and his chest aching miserably, was the last to get out. As the man ran and frolicked on the warm sand like so many London waifs, his voice arose

in command.

"Men, we may have to make this our home for many days, so let's be about preparing a shelter afore the chill of another night falls upon us."

AS IT turned out there were only four cutlasses, five knives, two pistols, and Edward Terror's own jewel-handled rapier among them. Using knives and cutlasses, the men soon had erected a palm frond lean-to well back on the beach. There now arose the problem of supplying food for the men.

"This island is a paradise of game, my hearties," Edward Terror addressed them. "But I'm afraid that we don't have the wherewithal to get any of the fat birds or wild pigs unless some of you are fleet of foot enough to run them through with a cutlass."

The young, eager looking Gallat stepped forth.

"If I might offer a suggestion, Captain Terror, why don't we make some longbows? My father's trade is that of bowmaking back in Bridgetown and, methinks, there's both strong wood and hardy vines enough in yonder wood to try his trade right here."

The lad's suggestion was a good one and soon the men of the ill-fated Maid of Avon were handling the roughly fashioned, but nonetheless accurate longbows with growing proficiency. Using stones for arrow heads and gull feathers on their shafts, the castaway archers had soon mastered the technique and were garnering an ample supply of fresh meat and fowl.

As the days stretched into weeks, the new found life of the men proved to be an enjoyable one. Recovered from their wounds and basking in the burning sun and frolicking in the rolling surf, they soon regained their strength and confidence. The island was ex-

plored from end to end and a deepwater cove of remarkable shipworthiness was located on the opposite side of the isle.

As one day Captain Terror, Gallat, and Duggley stood on a foliage covered promontory that dropped straight into the deep basin of this cove, Gallat pointed out to sea and exclaimed:

"By the saints, Captain Terror, if my eyes don't mistake me, that's a ship setting her course for this island."

Duggley and the captain squinted in the brilliant daylight and soon they made out the lines of a mighty three-master pursuing a tack that would bring her to the island in a few more hours.

"Your eyes are keen, Gallat, my lad." Captain Terror fingered the hilt of his rapier, and his black eyes, beneath their heavy brows, gleamed as he turned to Duggley. "Stab me, Duggley, but if yonder vessel makes a landing here, she may turn into the weapon of our deliverance."

"What do you mean, Edward? Shouldn't we light a fire to attract her attention?"

"No, my friend, I've had too much experience with unknown ships—and you should have had also—to attract them to us in these pirate-infested waters."

It was certain within another hour that the stranger was indeed heading for the island. As she smoothly sailed closer to the cove her sleek lines proved to be of French design. Under stud sails this French cut vessel was truly slashing a speedy track in the blue waters. She was pierced for thirty-six cannon and was one of the most beautifully designed vessels that Edward Terror had ever seen.

The three castaways dropped into the thick underbrush as the great brown and white vessel slipped majestically into the palm fringed cove. With a

great stir of motion, her sails furled and she glided to rest on the tranquil waters as her anchor chain rattled into the clear depths.

"LOOK at her gaff," the tense grip of Duggley's hand squeezed his captain's arm. "She flies the Jolly Roger!"

Limply drooping in the air hung a black flag with a great skull and cross-bones fashioned on its fabric. This beauteous stranger was a pirate vessel!

The trio lay silent in the bush while the curses and shouts of the crew below could be heard about their work of making their ship secure. At length, as the late afternoon sun began to slip toward the western horizon, the yells and murmurings became more raucous. The pirates were in their cups.

"Captain, look there in the stern-works." The voice of Gallat directed Edward Terror's gaze toward the heavily gilded and beautifully wrought stern of the pirate ship.

A jollyboat was trailing from the cabin window out of which a figure was now crawling. Behind him came another and the two of them could be seen lifting between them a mighty seachest. They dropped their cargo into the jollyboat and were soon joined by a third pirate whose figure was clothed in fine style and upon whose head sat a wide brimmed hat with a long trailing green feather.

"How do you like that, Duggley old man?" Captain Terror smiled as he turned to his navigator. "Three of the lads seem to have secret plans afoot. This will bear watching."

Once in their jollyboat, the three pirates headed for shore. The fancily dressed one sat pompously in the sternsheets. The remainder of the crew were evidently well on out of the world if their shouts and curses and bawdy

songs were a fair indication of their intoxication.

"Come on, men. Follow me."

Captain Terror arose from his concealment and beckoned to his companions. They slid down the bank from their position of vantage and, at length, found themselves near the spot where the jollyboat should hit the shoreline. Into the bushes they once more slipped as the pirate trio ran their small vessel ashore.

The great bulky figure of their evident leader was first out of the boat and he directed his two mates as they struggled and grunted under the weight of the iron bound chest.

"Get a move on, you scum," the lazy hulking figure hissed in a low coarse voice. "Do you want the rest of those drunken sea rats to discover us gone? If we're smart about it, the fatheads will never realize that we've taken the cream of the treasure when we divide what's left in the morning."

"Aye, Captain Marion," one of the rogues in calico drawers and a dirty red striped cotton shirt replied, "but if LeSandrassa discovers this night's work, he'll have the crew in mutiny in an instant."

"Blast LeSandrassa, you cowardly dog. I intend to run him through before we leave Dragon's Tooth Cove at any rate. He's only a mutinous pig who'll be better for a sticking!"

The trio moved away from the shore into the luxuriant foliage which was now darkening with the approach of nightfall. Captain Terror and his two men followed, making sure to keep in the bushes and well out of sight. The pirates struggled for some distance into the undergrowth until they came to a small clearing. Captain Marion ordered them to stop, pointed out a suitable spot and, within a matter of minutes, his two underlings were digging in the

soft sod, the sweat rolling off them in great globules of moisture.

AS CAPTAIN TERROR watched them in the dim light of dusk, his mind turned over the possibility of joining these scavengers of the seas. He knew instinctively, however, that their lawless rough life of piratical deeds was not for him nor his men. There was, nevertheless, the chance that they might—. He had time to reflect no longer.

Captain Marion had withdrawn two pistols from his belt and was aiming them at the backs of the men struggling with their spades in the deepening hole.

"No you don't, you——!" Captain Terror exclaimed as he leaped from the concealment of the underbrush and slashed at the pirate chieftain's hands with the slender shank of his drawn rapier.

"Bang!"

The crash of one pistol resounded through the glade and one of the men in the treasure pit crumpled with a great spreading red stain across his back. Captain Terror's slash, nevertheless, had caused the treacherous captain to drop his second weapon as the second pirate in the hole looked up and Duggley and Gallat burst into the clearing.

"Where have you come from, you scum?" His swarthy, evil face contorted, the pirate captain snarled in his rage as he wiped the blood from the back of his hand. "What manner of man are you to dare interfere with Captain Marion?"

"What manner of man are you," said Captain Terror, "a treacherous Judas who pistols his own men in the back without a word?"

The pirate captain snarled another curse and drew his blade as he backed away from the crouching wild-looking half-clad man before him. Duggley and

Gallat had seized the other pirate and watched eagerly while the two duelists circled one another warily.

"You stinking woods' rat, I'll have your life's blood for that interference!"

"Actions speak louder than words," the smiling Welshman said as he lunged forward.

The pirate parried the thrust and the woodland began to ring and echo with the clash of steel upon steel as the two antagonists bitterly parried and thrust at one another. Back and forth across the glade they danced and the faint half-light of dusk cast eerie long shadows on the verdant foliage around them. The pirate chieftain was skillful with his weapon and soon he had driven the more agile Edward Terror back toward a half-hidden fallen log.

"Here's for your trouble!" the sweating, panting pirate screamed in derision as his antagonist fell backwards over the unseen obstacle.

His lunge was like lightning, but Edward Terror rolled away in the very nick of time and Captain Marion found his point buried in nothing more than the earth.

"And here's for your trouble." Captain Terror had arisen and he viciously slashed his rapier across the sweating, straining face of the pirate.

"Dog!" screamed the maddened man through the blood streaming down his visage, as he threw himself at the sardonic fiend before him.

HOTTER and hotter waxed the fight but Edward Terror could feel his opponent weakening. At length, the pirate dropped his guard too long and, with one smooth lunge, Captain Terror slid his blade into the rogue's chest to the very hilt. He stepped back and the gasping, dying pirate crumbled into the grass.

"Neatly done Edward!" Dugley

cried as he moved to his captain's side. When he received a grin in answer, the blonde navigator continued. "That was as pretty a dispatching of a rogue as ever I've seen.

"What'll we do with this one?"

Captain Terror turned at Gallat's question and beheld the frightened figure in the red striped shirt and the calico breeches. Instantly a plan occurred to him. He could use this pirate knave to help the three of them, and the rest of the survivors of the Maid of Avon who were now on the other side of the island, to escape this island prison.

"This man was your leader, wasn't he?" Captain Terror questioned as he prodded the dead pirate from whose chest the rapier protruded.

"Aye, that he was, but LeSandrassa will take over now."

"Who's LeSandrassa?"

"He was Captain Marion's first mate. Ever since we raided Caracas, LeSandrassa has been waiting for a chance to take over. Now you have given it to him."

"Don't be too sure of that, mate," Captain Terror said cryptically and then, laying his finger on the pirate's chest, he continued. "You're free to return to your ship but the treasure stays with us. You can tell this rogue LeSandrassa that, if he wants the treasure, he's to meet me on the spit of sand that forms the northern side of the channel into Dragon's Tooth Cove, tomorrow at dawn. Understand?"

"Aye, but he'll have it anyway even if he has to comb the whole island for you."

"We'll see, my smart friend," Captain Terror grinned. "Now begone with you, else I change my mind and add you to the pile that your two friends will make."

The rogue disappeared along the trail to the cove and Captain Terror with-

drew his bloody rapier from the lifeless form of the pirate leader.

"Men, we'll throw this corpse in with the other, bury 'em and move the treasure deeper into the woods."

"What have you got in mind, Edward?" Duggley's brow was wrinkled as he helped.

"I'll tell you the way back to our encampment. If you and the rest agree to my plans, we may well be out of here within a matter of days and on our way to revenge."

More he would not say. They moved the treasure chest and, as night became complete in its blackness, the trio stalked through the underbrush to their encampment. They had a deal of news to spread to their seven other castaway mates.

THE long golden fang of the sand spit stretched out into the sea. As the light of the morning sun shimmered across the sea and flashed from the foam tips of the thundering breakers, around from the cove came two boatloads of pirates and buccaneers. The masts of their anchored ship could be seen reaching skyward above the roof of palms as their oars chopped the waters with a regular beat.

In the fore of the lead boat stood a tall hawkish buccaneer with a great scarlet and golden coat covering his thin sinewy body. His oily black hair was held back by a dirty orange bandana and, in his pierced ears, two heavy rings flashed with the light's reflection. As garish a bunch of rogues as the seven seas could sweep up were the two score picaroons and pirates that accompanied him. Clothed in multi-colored and dirty calico, cotton and satin finery and rags, the white and black skinned men were armed with every weapon of the times, cutlasses, pistols, pikes, and knives of every vari-

ety but of an evil and dangerous looking similarity withall.

The boats pulled through the fresh surf and their crews, jabbering and laughing like a tribe of monkeys, leaped into the backwash and pulled them high and dry on the hot sand. Led by the hawk-like rogue, they ascended the sandy beach and, at length, came to a spot before the fringe of jungle foliage. Here they stopped their trudging through the warm sands for before them stood a lone, almost naked man.

Captain Terror's foot rested on an open seachest which sparkled with the richness of its jeweled and golden content. His hands rested on his slim hips from which dangled a needle thin rapier. His lips, within the parchment brown of his face, were spread in a wide grin and his white teeth flashed in the morning light.

"A good morning to you, my hearties," he greeted the suddenly silent mob.

The greedy eyes of the pirates were upon the sprawling treasure, but the gaze of their leader rested on the muscular suntanned figure who so nonchalantly rested his bare foot on the gleaming wealth.

"So you're the one that did for the captain?" The voice of the tall buccaneer was surly and impudent. "Well, we've come for our treasure."

"Have you now? There's a bit of a deal that we'll settle first before I can let you have it."

At this the surly leader opened his great gash of a mouth and, holding his sides as if they might split from the exertion, he laughed and pointed at Captain Terror in derision.

"Mates, did you hear that? We must deal with him afore we can have our treasure. He stopped his laughter and waved his cutlass before him. "Seize the impudent scum and we'll be away

to the ship afore this farce can go any further."

The band of pirates shouted their approval of the hawkish leader's decision and moved ominously forward. Suddenly nine arrows whistled from behind Captain Terror's back and thudded deeply into the sand. They quivered for a moment before the toes of the foremost rogues and brought the garish mob to an instant stop.

"You see, my smart friend, I have the wherewithal to stop you within the trees at my back," smiled Captain Terror as the knaves looked incredulously behind him toward the unseen bowman of the forest. "Now will you deal with me or would you rather have those fuzzy tailed things growing from your chest?"

A look of hate and frustration lit the leader's face and, for an instant, he considered a headlong charge to do for this sardonic woodsman impudently standing before him. He thought better of it and spoke in a voice thick with frustrated rage.

"What's your deal, scum?"

Captain Terror did not answer him immediately but reached instead into the treasure chest and withdrew a leather bag, filled to the brim with gleaming round pearls. Unloosening the leather thong about the bag's neck, he flung it into the midst of the buccaneers.

"THERE'S a sample of what you'll be sharing in a few moments."

Like warfside waifs, the motley band scrambled and fought with one another to obtain part of the flashing cascade of richness that rolled onto the golden sands. The pirate leader stood stolid and tense before him.

"Now for the deal, LeSandrassa—that is your name, is it not?" The hawkish buccaneer nodded his head

and Captain Terror continued. "Last night I killed your captain in a fair fight and thus saved for you this treasure. In return for the treasure, which I claim no share of, you will make me your new captain."

There was complete silence for a moment and then, having retrieved all the pearls from the sand and now paying him attention, the pirates spoke up.

"Aye, that's fair enough."

"He did for Captain Marion and, by the rules of the brotherhood, his claim is just."

LeSandrassa turned around in anger and eyed his disloyal crew.

"Shut up, you rats. We'll have the treasure anyway. How do you think this knave could lead you? Remember what I did for you at Caracas, at Blackman's Bluff, and the attack on Pinar del Rio. You need a fighting man, not a landlubberly jack-a-napes." He paused and an evil grin lit his thin face. Winking to his men, he turned and faced the smiling Welshman before him. "Howsomever, I'm a fair and just man. If yonder fop can best me in fair fight, why I'm more than willing to let him take charge."

Now, with their minds whetted for a good fight, the men shouted their approval of LeSandrassa's offer.

"Good enough."

"If the stranger's tough enough to make a good captain, he's hardy enough to beat the Frenchman."

"Let's have the fight."

Captain Terror withdrew his rapier and stepped forward over the glittering treasure.

"All right, my cocky friend. That's fair enough."

"Aye, but discard your pig-stabber," LeSandrassa said with an evil smirk. "My mates have a better liking for knives."

With that he withdrew a long gleam-

ing shaft of steel from his waistband and threw off his coat and kicked off his seaboots. Another pirate, seeing that the half-clad stranger carried no similar weapon, threw a second knife at Captain Terror's feet. Eagerly now the buccaneers crowded around in a semi-circle to watch the bloodletting.

Back amidst the covering foliage Gallat grasped Duggley by the arm. Around about the seven other members of the Maid of Avon's crew stood ready with their longbows and full arrow quivers on their backs.

"This is getting dangerous, Duggley."

"Aye, but we'll wait awhile here. Edward seems to know what he is about. Keep the men ready for instant action."

Captain Terror picked up the knife from the sand and, running his thumb the length of its shaft, found the blade more than sharp enough. The hawkish LeSandrassa had stripped to the waist and his wiry muscles rippled in the warm morning air. The two adversaries circled one another and the Welshman noted that his opponent was lefthanded. This would indeed be a dangerous fight. The crew closed in, shouting for action and blood.

SUDDENLY the pirate leaped forward and slashed upward at the stomach of the chestnut-brown figure of Captain Terror. The Welshman leaped backward and the deadly blade missed by a hair's breadth. Before he could slash in turn, LeSandrassa had fallen to the ground, rolled over and was on his feet again a half dozen yards away. No wonder he wanted to use knives, thought the half clad woodsman. He was a past master at the deadly game.

Again LeSandrassa lunged, expecting the stranger to leap back. This time, however, Captain Terror, risking all,

stepped forward and glided to the right. He felt the pain of a slash as the pirate's turning knife raked his left side but he sunk his own knife deeply into the upper arm of his attacker.

"Aye-e-e-e-e—"

The pirates were now screaming madly as the red stain of blood flowed over the antagonists. LeSandrassa was enraged, and his left arm, the one that wielded the bloody blade, was streaming red—Captain Terror knew that its speed had been hindered. He closed with the pirate just as a knee shot into his groin. His body exploded into a white hot bundle of burning nerves with the pain of the unexpected kick and he collapsed onto the sand. In a trice the pirate was upon him, slashing at his stomach. Captain Terror kicked out as the blade dug into his thigh and LeSandrassa fell backward.

Pained and mad with rage himself, the Welshman leaped on the prostrate buccaneer and plunged his dagger into the rogue's heart just as LeSandrassa's knife buried itself inch deep in his shoulder.

Gasping and wracked with pain he rolled off the dead pirate's form as Duggley and his men burst from the woods. He crumbled to the ground senseless as Gallat tenderly removed the knife from his shoulder.

When he finally came to his senses, Duggley was standing over him in an ornate beamed cabin. The beams flickered and wavered in the light reflecting from the water through the open cabin window.

"You're safe aboard your new ship, Edward," the smiling blonde navigator spoke. "You lost a deal of blood but you gained many supporters. Those men of LeSandrassa's have been dividing the treasure on the beach and we've been taking over the ship."

Duggley patched up Captain Terror's many wounds from a medicine chest that he had found in the stern locker as the Welshman looked his new surroundings over. The cabin clothes locker was filled with finery, satins and taffetas, greatcoats and lace shirts and leather boots, periwigs, baldrics, and buckles. Charts of the Caribbean waters lay strewn on a huge oaken table and a fine heavy silverware set lay in its box by an open cabin window.

"By the saints, Duggley," laughed the pale, wounded Welshman, "we're going to live like kings and look like kings even if we do act like pirates.

"Now let us see the contents of this good ship's galley," he continued, "for, faith, my belly touches my backbone from hunger."

"Sure, and you must be near starved," Duggley answered, a solicitous look on his face. "I'll have the cook get you a fine dinner right away."

WITH this he hurried out, leaving Edward to ruefully contemplate his wounds and his white, haggard face in the cabin mirror.

Soon Duggley returned, carrying a tray laden high with steaming delicacies.

"This Captain Marion believed in keeping a fine table," he grinned as he set the tray down in front of Edward. "There is food below fit for Charles of Spain himself."

Edward fell to with a will under the paternal eye of his brawny navigator. After the sharp edge of his hunger had been dulled somewhat, he said to Duggley:

"My lad, on this bloody ship with its cut-throat crew we will be walking on treacherous ground indeed. I must have men around me whom I can trust. Now, I have in mind yourself for first mate. What think you of young Gallat for

second?"

"Aye, Edward," Duggley answered. "He is a fighting-cock if ever I saw one; and, if you lead, he would follow into Hell itself."

"He may have to," laughed Captain Terror, his spirits revived by the hot food and the fine Madeira. "I have been thinking to myself, Tom, of what use is it to pile up wealth by honest toil, only to lose it to the arrogant Dons of Spain? From this day on, I mean to be the hunter instead of the prey."

"Well said, Edward," enthused the usually stolid Somersetshireman. "Once, now, have we been wiped out by the bloody Dons; and fortunate indeed have we been to escape with our lives."

Edward was about to answer, when he was interrupted by the roar of many voices coming from the deck below.

"What is that," he asked intently. "What is the matter with the crew?"

"They have had their spot of grog and I imagine they're having a turn with the dice," Duggley answered. "You know how noisy they can be at times."

"I don't like the sound of it," Edward persisted, "methinks it has a strange ring."

"I'll have a look," Duggley promised, hurrying out. Soon he came back, his face grave. With his eyes cast down he informed slowly:

"They have dragged a wench up from the hold—they mean to have cruel sport with the poor thing."

Captain Terror leaped up, overturning the table with a crash.

"What!" he shouted. "Not on my ship—"

He lurched painfully toward the door. Quickly the mate barred his way.

"No, Captain," he pleaded. "I like it no better than yourself but the men are in an ugly mood and to deprive

them of their cruel play would be but to invite mutiny—she is probably only a bawd, the kind you find in every port.”

Captain Terror pushed him roughly aside.

“She is a woman and defenseless,” he proclaimed. “Now, out of my way!”

He flung open the door and stamped out onto the deck, his face like a thundercloud. Duggley followed, with worry etched on his own features.

As quickly as his wounds would permit, Edward led the way down onto the deck. He let out a string of crackling oaths when he saw the tableau spread out before him.

Tied to the mainmast, her hands stretched above her, surrounded by a ring of hooting, blaspheming, buccaneers, was a lovely, white-faced Spanish girl.

HER clothes were in tatters and her brown hair hung down over her shoulders in rippling waves. Her eyes were closed and her lips moved regularly as if she were praying.

A huge black bearded ruffian went mincing up to her.

“Don’t ye have a little kiss for good old Shark?” he leered.

With this he thrust his hideous face forward and fastened his bearded lips on her mouth. She struggled frantically, twisting her head from side to side and writhing in her bonds, as he pressed his body against hers and held her in his foul embrace.

He laughed as at last he stood back from her shrinking form.

“We’ll let all of these handsome lads take turns,” he bellowed. “But first we’ll show them something to keep them interested.”

With this, he put a grimy paw inside her bodice and with a savage tug ripped her dress open.

There was an instant, dreadful si-

lence as the women-starved men stared at the exquisite body so suddenly revealed. Then, there was a vicious roar and the passion-crazed crew began to mill about the terrified girl. One had fastened his hand in her hair and was cutting her bonds with his knife, preparatory to dragging her to the deck, when Edward leaped into action.

Cursing wildly, he stormed through the milling mob of men, tearing a cutlass from one as he went. Belaboring heads and backs as he forced his way through he finally got to the mast.

Shielding the girl with his body he roared:

“Back, you filthy sons-of-dogs!—back, or by Neptune, the fish will feed well this day!”

As the defiant men fell slowly back, nursing their cracked heads and aching backs, Edward turned to the sobbing girl. He clothes had nearly been torn from her body, and, in spite of his rage, Edward could not resist the instinctive thrill which ran through him.

Her face was lovely and patrician, the skin an ivory white, the eyes a deep blue, the nose finely molded and slightly upturned, the lips full and delicately curved, all crowned by an incredibly long mass of rich brown hair.

As Captain Terror’s eyes traveled on along her torn clothing, his heart began to pump strangely. Resolutely forcing his gaze upward, he saw that she was watching him fixedly, the look of a trapped rabbit upon her face.

He quickly drew his knife and sliced the ropes which bound her wrists to the mast. He heard her labored breathing in his ear as he sawed at the ropes about her slim waist. A gust of air blew a silky strand of scented hair across his face and, as he bent down to free her ankles, he discovered that his hands were trembling so that he could barely hold the knife.

THE Devil! He swore silently to himself.

As he straightened up, she ineffectually tried to hold the tattered remnants of her dress together. Captain Terror motioned for her to follow him and she took a tentative step forward. Tottering, she almost fell and saved herself only by clutching the mast for support.

"I—I cannot stand," she murmured in a sweet, faintly husky voice. "Those ropes—they were so tight."

Her English was perfect, spoken with a delicious, slurred accent. Once more Captain Terror felt the blood pound in his temples as he put his arm around the waist of the lovely girl. Steadying her, he led the way slowly through the crowd of glowering men.

As they set foot on the poop deck, the muttering of the pirates burst into a roar. The bearded Shark pushed his way from amidst the crew and confronted his new captain. His rugged face was contorted in an expression of mixed frustration and hate.

"What right have you to deprive us of our sport with this Spanish bawd?" he spat. "If her men-folks or the black-robed monks of the Inquisition had ye tied to that mast, they'd have the flesh off your bones in small pieces!"

With a full-arm sweep Captain Terror struck him full in the mouth. Shark went down like a felled tree. After a minute, he arose to one knee, shaking his head slowly.

"Save your passion for the waterfront sluts to whom you are accustomed," Captain Terror said coldly.

"You want her for yourself!" the prostrate buccaneer hissed.

Catlike, Captain Terror leaped across the deck. Drawing his knife he bent down and grasped the surly pirate by his dirty shirt.

"One more word out of you, my Beauty," he said sweetly, "and I'll nail

your lying tongue to yonder mast!"

The sullen crew was silent. Duggley and Gallat stood tensely ready before the cowering figure of the Spanish girl. The moment passed and Captain Terror arose, deliberately turned his back upon the hushed crew and joined his two friends and the girl.

"You must run this ship with an iron hand, Edward, if ye expect these devils to follow you," Duggley whispered with a sigh of relief.

"And why do you think I handled yonder knave so abruptly?" Captain Terror answered. "I will give the crew something to think about."

As Duggley accompanied his captain and the captive girl to the greatcabin, his eyes watched the dark Welshman with a mixture of silent admiration and wonderment. The change from peaceful merchantman to rugged pirate leader was coming with ease to this amazing man.

Captain Terror followed the girl into the cabin and turned to close the door. It was blocked by Duggley, who was following close upon his heels. Captain Terror put his hand upon Duggley's broad chest and gently pushed him out again.

"I will call you if I need you, friend," he said reprovingly.

AS HE closed the door, the last thing that he saw was the navigator's grinning face, one eye closed in a broad wink. Swearing softly under his breath, Captain Terror slammed and bolted the door. He turned to his fair hostage who was huddled in the corner on the window seat and was trying vainly to arrange her torn dress so that it would cover the more obvious of her many charms.

"You will be bothered no more, my lady," he said gallantly. "Now tell me how you fell captive to this mangy

crew."

He walked over to her, pulled up a stool and sat down. To his amazement she shrank back from him, fear and loathing showing plainly on her pale face. Edward stared at her nonplussed. Then he threw back his head and roared with laughter, showing his even, white teeth.

"No wonder you fear me," he chuckled. "Faith, I must look a sight to receive such a fair visitor. Forgive my appearance for I just arose from a sick bed. At that," he went on, "I should think that you would prefer me to Shark."

She looked at him coldly.

"Prefer any murdering pirate who plunders honest men of the sea to another?" she spoke with disdain. "Indeed, there seems little choice—your men, at least, do not mask their intent behind a lot of pretty phrases."

Edward's face grew grave as the girl continued passionately.

"You shall have short sport of me—I shall throw myself over the side at the first opportunity!"

"Aren't you being ungrateful?" Edward asked her sternly. "If you think that I desire you, or that you are in any way attractive to me, you flatter yourself no end."

The Lord forgive me for that lie, he thought, keeping his face stern.

"Then what do you propose to do with me?"

"First, tell me who you are and where you come from," the Welshman countered.

"My name is Dolores de Vayo. My father is Don Sebastian de Vayo, governor of Panama."

Captain Terror whistled soundlessly as the girl moved closer.

"My father wanted me to marry a much older man," she continued. "A great admiral and nobleman. I refused,

but he insisted. So I fled from Porto Bello aboard a small vessel for Jamaica and some English friends of mine. Just two days ago the ship was sunk and I was captured and thrown in your filthy hold—as you well know!"

"But I did not know," Edward told her. "You see, this was not my ship."

He explained to her the recent incidents attendant to his seizure of Captain Marion's pirate frigate. When he had finished, she looked at him with open admiration.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she breathed. "You are a man!"

"I will put you off at the first English possession that we come to," he said. "Until then, I am your servant."

For the first time he saw her smile. She slipped gracefully to her feet and made a low curtsy. The dark-haired girl was indeed breathtaking in her charm.

"Just one thing more, Captain," she smiled. "A tub of hot water, an hour's privacy and some clean clothes."

"They will have to be seaman's clothes, Donna Dolores," Captain Terror replied. "I will bring you the smallest that I can discover."

WITH that, he arose and left the cabin. He gave instructions to the cook to send up the clothes and a tub of heated water and then he ordered Duggley to pipe the crew on deck.

"Men," Captain Terror addressed the still somewhat sullen pirates, "Duggley, here, is to be your new mate and navigator; Gallat, your second mate. As for the other officers, I'll choose them when I know you better. Now it has been called to my attention that this vessel is in a sad state of repair, her cannon rusty, her 'tween decks filthy, much of her rigging frayed and dangerous, and her bottom foul with

barnacles. So, we'll dismantle her in the lagoon, careen her on the beach and make her ship-shape and seaworthy." The men grumbled as Captain Terror paused and then continued coldly. "The first one who molests the Spanish lady by as much as a word will hang from the yardarm—within an hour. Is that clear?"

The savage faces of the buccaneer band reflected the uncertainty that they felt regarding their new captain. The incident of the Spanish girl was still fresh in their minds. But yet not a dissenting word was spoken in the face of the determined Welshman.

At length, after a few moments of lingering silence, Captain Terror turned from the men and addressed his eager young mate.

"Gallat lad, ever since you fashioned your equipage on yonder island and obtained our food for us, I've had it in the back of my mind to have a company of archers aboard deck in action."

"Aye. We could operate from the shrouds and do fearful close-in execution in battle." Gallat's eyes shone with anticipation. "Can I form a company, Captain Terror?"

"That you can, lad. Take any twenty that you want and make yourself captain of the company. Methinks that your archers with their rapid fire will be not only an innovation but a deadly added implement to our fighting power."

Gallat left, scarcely able to contain himself, and Edward strolled on up to his cabin. He paused in front of the door and ran his fingers through his thick, black hair. Taking a deep breath he knocked.

"Come in," the husky voice murmured.

As Edward walked in he saw in the middle of the room what appeared to be

a small, waterfront urchin. Her brown hair was tucked under a seaman's cap and she was dressed from head to boot in seaman's garb. The only discordant note to the ensemble was the suspicious swelling of the faded blue shirt-front.

"Do I look enough like one of your men, Captain Terror?" she said, pirouetting about before him.

"Donna Dolores, you could not look like a man if you wore a suit of mail," Edward answered gallantly.

She quickly lowered her eyes.

"How soon can you put me ashore?" she asked, looking up again.

"Perhaps a month, perhaps six weeks."

"Dios! So long!"

"But yes, Donna Dolores. The ship must be repaired and I have a score to settle with a certain Spanish Vice-Admiral." His voice was tinged with bitterness as he paused. "I will leave you here on the island, however, with a guard of trustworthy men—for I have no desire to subject you to the dangers of possible naval action."

"Never!" she interposed hotly. "I will not stay here—I want to come along with you."

"Very well," Captain Terror returned. "I have warned you. Surely you would not care to see a ship of your own Spain destroyed?"

She laughed scornfully.

"I have no love for Charles of Spain," she said heatedly. "Remember, I am an exile because I refused to marry that pig of a de Sadista!"

"De Sadista!" Captain Terror exclaimed. "Not the Vice-Admiral of the Caribbean Squadron?"

"Yes," she said in bewilderment. "Do you know him?"

"Know him?" laughed Captain Terror bitterly. "Let me tell you a story—a long story."

HAVING previously told her of the events leading from his forced sojourn on the island, he now told the girl of the events leading to his castaway life. When he had finished his tale of the treacherous attack on the Maid of Avon, the Spanish girl surveyed him breathlessly.

"Santa Maria!" she cried, clutching him by the shoulder passionately. "How I will bless you if you send that devil to the bottom!"

Something snapped within Captain Terror. Her beauty and the added incentive of her own hatred for the Spanish Vice-Admiral combined to overwhelm his senses. He reached out and swept her into his arms. Holding her tightly against him, he kissed her surprised mouth.

"Bless me again, Dolores," he said tenderly, "and I would bring you Charles of Spain himself!"

With surprising strength she wrenched away from him.

"How dare you!" she cried, her cheeks scarlet. Her eyes blazed and she balled up her small hands and struck the Welshman on the chest.

Edward looked down from his great height on the dainty creature so busily engaged in pounding on his broad chest. There was a ludicrous expression of surprise on his handsome face and the Spanish girl paused. She looked up at him and her anger passed as suddenly as it had appeared.

"You great hulking fool," she laughed. "If you could only see your silly expression."

Edward flushed.

"I did not realize that I was so amusing," he said stiffly. "It will not happen again."

"Now you are angry," she mocked. "Perhaps I have wounded your pride."

Edward suddenly reached for her again but she quickly pushed a chair

between them and skipped nimbly away.

"No, Captain," she protested, backing away. "Please!"

Edward pulled up short, realizing what a fool he was making of himself. He glared at her.

"This cabin is yours," he growled. "I will bunk with the mate. If you need anything, you may call for Duggley!"

He turned and stamped toward the door.

"Captain Terror."

"What do you want?" he tossed over his shoulder.

"I'm sorry I laughed at you—but you did look amusing."

With an oath Edward rushed out and slammed the cabin door behind him. When he had regained his temper, he called Gallat and told him to see to it that the crew commenced the needed repair work—at once.

The crew grumbled at the unaccustomed labor but was, nevertheless, soon at work on the dismantled ship. A camp was made on the golden sand of the beach. A single tent had been pitched for the Spanish girl and Edward resolutely ignored her. Extra spars were cut from the forest growth and before many days had gone by the ship was once again afloat and new rigging was beginning to grow in her upper works.

GALLAT formed his company of bowmen who daily increased their skill with the longbow and Captain Terror whipped the remainder of the crew in shape with gunnery drills and sword and pike fighting practice. For already he had in mind many things for this new found crew and ship; the most important of which was the exacting of vengeance from the Spaniard, De Sadista. A hankering for this ven-

geance seemed to gnaw at his bones like some nauseous disease.

One fine day, Duggley, Gallat and Von Tromp, a Dutch buccaneer who had been a gunner under the great De Ruyter, were standing over the oaken table which stood in the sand on the spit. The table was covered with charts, and Captain Terror was resplendent in black and scarlet taffetas with a curling black periwig falling on his shoulders and his face shielded from the burning sun by a black broad-brimmed hat whose red feather trailed rakishly over his shoulder.

"My lads, it's nigh onto time for some action," the lean Welshman said. "If I only knew what the Spanish squadron was about, I could make up my mind in a trice."

"Pardon, Captain Terror," the gruff, throaty voice of the stubby Von Tromp spoke up. "But this is their usual time for taking their yearly haul of pearls from Rio de la Hache back to Spain."

"Is that so now," said the Captain as his eyes narrowed in thought. "And where do they usually come through, the Windward or the Mona Passage?"

"Always the Mona Passage, Captain, but we dare not attack them. They're six men-of-war, two of which are forty-four gun ships. Even Morgan at his strongest would never have dared that. There are other ways of bleeding the men of Castile."

Captain Terror stood thoughtful for a moment. That Spanish cur must pay for his treachery. What's more, this island itself lay on the eastern edge of the Mona Passage.

"Gentlemen, we slip out with the tide in the morning. We're going to see the Spanish Squadron."

The other three looked at one another aghast. He certainly couldn't be considering the possibility of attacking the most formidable force in the entire

Caribbean?

When the others left Von Tromp approached the elegant figure in silver and scarlet.

"Captain, you must reconsider what is in the back of your head."

"You fought with De Ruyter in '73 off the Texel, didn't you?"

"Aye, but—"

"He was a brave admiral and he usually fought against odds."

"I know, Captain Terror, but—"

"But nothing, Von Tromp. You take me for an utter fool before I've proven else. Bide your tongue and time and, mayhap, Fortune will present us with an opening."

The Dutchman shrugged his shoulders and walked off. This mad Englishman was beyond him.

With the ebbing of the tide in the morning, the Vengeance, for such was the new name of Captain Terror's great brown and white ship, slipped out of Dragon's Tooth Cove and gayly cleared the sand spit point. It was good to feel the flow of the breeze and be aboard the rocking boards of a fine vessel again, thought the black-browed Welshman. As the Vengeance gained steerage and her sheets billowed to the southerly breeze, he knew that underfoot was a vessel of speed and agility. Lacking the sturdiness of the English and Dutch built ships, the Vengeance, nonetheless, incorporated all the grace and speed that only a French builder could impart to a sailing vessel.

WITHIN a few days the Vengeance had taken up her station off Cape Engano on the western tip of the Mona Passage. At a conference in his cabin over some fine Canary wine, Captain Terror, Duggley, Von Tromp, and Gallat bent over the charts. If they reckoned correctly from the date of his former ill-fated meeting with the San

Nicolas, the Spanish Squadron should be wearing through the straits within the week, her hulls full of pearls for the coffers of Charles II, King of Spain.

The wind strengthened from the south and chopped the sea up in the straits. If the Spanish Squadron beat through the passage now she would come hell-bent with a strong wind at her stern. Captain Terror had no more of an idea as to what he was going to do in the event of meeting the cursed Spanish foe than he had knowledge of the priesthood, but his Welsh blood gave him a trust in fortune that the others were wont to openly criticize.

"I tell you, my lads, I won't be content until I see this great fearsome fleet that I've heard so much about, even if it ends in our showing them our heels."

The breeze had slackened again but it was still blowing up a bit of lace on the rollers when the lookout sighted some specks on the horizon riding the southerly breeze through the straits. As time gained and distance lessened, it proved to be indeed the fleet of the Spanish Caribbean Admiral. In twin columns the six vessels, under a full press of sail, were wearing through the Mona Passage. Our Blessed Mother and other renderings from the Holy Book decorated the mainsails of the galleons. Bringing up the tail of the closer westernmost column was none other than the San Nicolas, with her Vice-Admiral's pennant smartly fluttering at her foremast tip.

"The sight of that pennant burns me like the fires of perdition," exclaimed Captain Terror venomously to Gallat as the two stood in the crosstrees. "But friend Fortune has placed them in our very laps, my hearty. Get your men in the rigging, Gallat, and carry out my bidding for I think that we shall have action."

With that he dropped down the

shrouds and ratlines to the waist. He called Duggley and the crotchety Von Tromp to his side.

"Mates, I've got a plan that may cause untold trouble to yonder proud gentlemen of Castile. Listen carefully to what I have to say for there is a mite of danger to be experienced."

There on the deck of his fine ship, Captain Terror told them of his plan of action and also beat off the arguments of that former ace gunner of De Ruyter's, Von Tromp. When he had finished, he glanced toward his cabin and saw the slight figure of the Spanish girl in the doorway.

Quickly he went up to her.

"You must go to the hold below," he told her sharply. "It will not be safe up here—we are about to attack yon fleet."

They were the first words he had spoken to her since the day in the cabin, many days past, when he had kissed her.

"Attack?" She stared at him in wonderment. "Are you mad?"

"Get below," he said, ignoring her remarks, "and hurry."

"I shall stay where I am," she told him, lifting her head proudly and looking him full in the eye. "Whatever our faults, we Spanish are not cowards."

Edward could hardly restrain his admiration as he looked at the beautiful, proud face.

"Very well," he returned briefly. "But keep under cover."

May the Good Lord keep her safe, he thought somberly to himself as he rejoined the men, his ardor for the coming battle somewhat dampened by his concern for her safety.

SO IT was that Don Berona de Fecento, Admiral of the Caribbean Squadron, saw the approach of a fine looking ship of Spain, with the gold and

scarlet emblem of Castile at her main-truck, beating close-hauled into the wind that was at his own stern. This fine ship approached head-on towards his squadron midway between the two columns.

"Shall I run open our ports, Admiral?" his conscientious gunner said as he stood beside him on the forty-four gun San Felipe.

"What for, you foolish son of a pig? She's Spanish and she doesn't show her own guns."

"I perceive that. Admiral, but it might be a trick. These are buccaneer waters."

"Tell me, Carlos, do you jump at your own shadow?" The great man was sarcastic. "Do you really believe that a single ship would dare attack the Caribbean Squadron? Why, that foul knave Morgan didn't dare it with a fleet. Go back to your post. You need a rest for your nerves."

The brown and white ship had now come closer and many waving men could be discerned lining her yardarms.

"Look, Captain, they are thrilled by the sight of so much Spanish might." The great Admiral beamed as he spoke to the master of the San Felipe standing beside him.

"I see, sire, but their impudence in sailing amidst our formation should be reported. I don't like it."

Don Berona de Facento condescended to only a smile at this nervous ship's master. His own egotism was in for quite a shock, however, for aboard the Vengeance the guns were loaded, the sparks were lit and the buccaneer guncrews waited tensely behind closed ports.

"Look, Duggley," eagerly Captain Terror spoke to his navigator, "Gallat's company waving in the rigging, our Spanish flag and the closed gunports have completely deceived them. Those

poor fools."

Captain Terror stood in the waist and the gunners watched him as the Vengeance moved into the hostile center. He waited until the San Felipe and the Infanta, forty-four guns, were on either side. Then he brought his arm down.

"Pay 'em our compliments, men!"

In a trice the ready gunports snapped open and thirty-six thirty-two pounders lunged forth, eighteen on the starboard side pointing at the San Felipe and the port guns pointing at the Infanta.

"Crash!"

The two broadsides pounded forth in one terrific blast. At once the guns were run back, swabbed, reloaded, and rammed. As the monstrous clouds of gunsmoke rolled away to her rear, the men on the Vengeance let out a scream of derision and joy. The broadsides had caused great damage and consternation to the unsuspecting Spaniards. The mizzenmast of the Infanta had come rattling down and great holes and gaps in both shrouds and hulk appeared on the San Felipe.

"Crash!"

Once again the twin broadsides let go as the Vengeance slid swiftly through the seas to a position between the next two of the Spanish Squadron, both forty gun galleons, the Santisima Cadiz and the Santa Ana. The dumb-founded men of Castile had no more time than to run out but a few of their guns when the broadsides crashed into them. The Santisima Cadiz lost her bowsprit and the Santa Ana dropped her foremast. Both received additional damage and casualties in the rigging and among their crews and both looked like shambles.

"Run down that stinking flag of Spain," Captain Terror shouted to one of his hands, "and send aloft the Cross of St. George."

MEANWHILE, Vice-Admiral Don Alvarez de Perona de Sadista stood open mouthed in awful amazement on the high poop deck of his scarlet ship, the San Nicolas. The affair had come to pass within the brief space of a few minutes and already the two lead ships in the twin columns were wallowing sorely stricken in the blue seas. He crossed himself and screamed at his gunners and first mate. This great blasphemer of his Catholic Majesty's Fleet, the brown and white ship now flying the cursed English ensign, was between his ship and the Valencia, last ships in their respective columns.

"Crash!"

A third twin broadside erupted from the flanks of the daring Englishman but this time there was a desultory and hasty return fire. The air eddied with swirling clouds of gunsmoke and the Englishman was hidden in the haze from her guns. Her third twin broadsides had not done the damage of the first two, but yet the San Nicolas suffered rents in her rigging and loss of life on her decks while the smaller twenty-two gun Valencia showed great gashes in her larboard railing and stern works.

"What did I tell you, Duggley," Captain Terror laughed as he slapped his blonde navigator's broad back. "Smack down the center we wore and blasted each and every one of them, with aught but one stinking ball in our starboard flank for the trouble."

"Aye, Edward, and by the time those heavy lead ships wear around on a fair tack into this head wind, we'll be safely away." The navigator's eyes flashed. "By the great bear, it was brilliant. You've tweaked the beard of the most powerful force on the Main and now we're safe away."

"Not quite, lad," the elegantly clad captain said and pointed over the taff-

rail."

If the signal system of the Spanish Navy could only have incorporated some of the choice epithets that the Castillian tongue is famed for, the top shrouds of Admiral de Fecento's San Felipe would that day have flown them all, such was the rage in which he found himself. As it was, all that he could do was to order the speedier San Nicolas and the Valencia to turn about and pursue this foul treacherous fiend of England. These two ships had made about and were straining their last ounce of seamanship and skill in the pursuit of the Vengeance.

"Shall I pour on more sheet, Edward? Our slick bottom will enable us to outdistance those two bilge drinkers."

"No. Pull in some of the top sheets, Duggley lad. We'll let them chase us for yet awhile and, in time, catch up—but only after we're safe away from interference from their larger sisters."

The pursuit bowled on over the running seas and the remainder of the Spanish Squadron was left behind. Captain Terror had had his crew served with rum and, walking among the garish but well-disciplined pirates, he received their unreserved praise and coarse compliments. Never had any of them served under such a daring and skillful commander.

"You see those two eager hounds that pursue us, my hearties?" He addressed a gathering of buccaneers in the waist. "Well, lads, their holds are bulging with choice pearls that I greatly fear the King of Spain will never fondle. I mean to have them for you." A great roar of approval went up. "Remember it well when the time comes for fighting."

VON TROMP stood beside him at the quarterdeck rail, his sour countenance dismayed at the thought of fur-

ther unnecessary danger.

"Von Tromp, you Dutch rascal, you've handled the guns with a touch that De Ruyter would have been proud of. I've further tests of your ability shaping up, however."

The stubby Dutch pirate shrugged off his captain's friendly pat and spoke petulantly.

"Captain, these two pursuers outgun us. Your first brilliant success may cause you to tempt Lady Fortune too much. We'd better be out of these waters with all speed."

"Von Tromp, I sometimes wonder what misfortune ever made you take to the pirating trade," said Captain Terror good-naturedly. "Your Dutch reticence and mathematical mind calculate only the risks against an operation. Why, man, you do not think me fool enough to buck them both together, do you? Their own eagerness will be their downfall." With that he pointed over the rail where it was plain to see that the speedier Valencia had outdistanced the San Nicolas and was coming up at a goodly rate. "Yonder Spaniard thinks that, because we flee for the moment, we do not consider suddenly turning upon him before his consort can come to his aid."

Von Tromp's eyes widened as he understood the captain's plan. Indeed, the Englishman was not the fool that he, Von Tromp, had thought him.

Captain Terror stood beside Duggley on the poop deck and watched his men climb into the rigging. The moment had almost arrived. He would have preferred it if the Valencia had outdistanced the Vice-Admiral further—but such was not the case. He issued his orders with a wave of his hand to Gallat in the upper works.

The Vengeance suddenly seemed to halt in midstride as the sails furled, the yardarms shifted, and Gallat's men

tumbled the wind out of her sheets. The brown and white ship slipped around broadside to the oncoming Valencia before the Spaniard knew what was about and her starboard guns roared out a broadside.

"Crash!"

The weight of her load caught the twenty-two gun vessel in the bowsprit, sheared it away with the foremast stays and ratlines and cut swathes of destruction the length of her deck. The Vengeance, under the tricky and skillful handling of Gallat's men, swung further around until her unfired port guns came into line. By now the Spaniard had turned to larboard to bring his own guns to bear and the two broadsides crashed out as one.

Von Tromp's skill was not to be denied and the heavier weight of the pirate vessel's metal tore down the main and mizzenmasts, blasted the Valencia's gunports and rails and left her a smoking demi-hulk of ruin.

The smoke of the battle hid the two ships from view as the thirty-two gun San Nicolas slid into the battle mist, her eager Spanish gunners waiting tensely to obtain the vengeance that they felt they so richly deserved from this English heretic.

Aboard his vessel Captain Terror had stripped to the waist, thrown off his periwig and donned a red speckled bandana. In his waist sash he had thrust a brace of pistols and the silver needle of his rapier was bared. There would be hand-to-hand fighting ere this day's work were finished. Gallat's bowmen were in the rigging, Von Tromp commanded the guns and Duggley stood by the helmsman. The Vengeance had taken some damage as the blood-stained boards attested and hands were busy repairing the parted ratlines, shattered rails, burst cannon, and splintered timbers.

"THERE are the topworks of the Vice-Admiral," Duggley pointed to the spars and upper shrouds of the San Nicolas ploughing through the hazy fog of smoke roundabout.

"Fire through the smoke, Von Tromp. They're not certain yet as to who's who."

The Spaniard, however, had seen the English ensign at their main-truck, towering through the fast dispelling smoke. She turned and, as the screen of smoke lifted enough for the bucan- eers to see her steel studded flank, a blistering broadside ploughed into the Vengeance. Von Tromp answered and the battle became a horrible confusion of smoke, flame, screams, and falling spars.

Cooly Captain Terror directed his vessel in closer to the game and bitterly fought San Nicolas. The Valencia lay now out of the fight, crippled, flaming and licking her many wounds. Through the yellowing haze the Vengeance crept with her guns firing continuously. She had taken much damage but, so far, her masts stood intact as did those of the Spaniard.

Gallat and his bowmen, in the ratlines above the thickest of the smoke, could at last pick out targets and soon unexpected shafts were whistling down upon the Spaniard's deck and doing fearful execution. This sudden attack from above their heads unnerved the hard pressed Spaniards as claw-like grappling hooks swung out from the Vengeance and the two ships ground together, side-by-side and securely bound. Von Tromp continued his gunnery as did the Spaniard and the execution below decks was frightful at such point blank range.

"Follow me, lads," Captain Terror shouted.

He grabbed a ratline and swung onto the Spaniard's deck with his rapier be-

tween his teeth. At his heels swarmed the bucan-ner crew, the most deadly and ferocious hand-to-hand shipboard fighters that the world has ever known.

Edward Terror dropped to the deck with a thrill of strange joy racing through his veins. The final accounting with this treacherous sea-wolf for the rape of the Maid of Avon was at hand. All the hate and rage that had boiled within him for so many days was now free, and, like a fiend possessed, he slashed and pistoled his way through the struggling mob until, at last, he stood before the final knot of surviving Spaniards in the aft of the waist. A wild savage look was in his black eyes and his blade was bloody when he confronted the red and white pantalooned figure of the Vice-Admiral.

Don Alvarez de Perona de Sadista stood erect in his steel corselet and helmet. He knew that his end was at hand but, like a true son of Spain, he would die fighting. His sword crossed with that of this wild looking rogue in the red speckled bandana before him. On the blood-slippery deck the two duelists slashed at one another as the end of the fight drew nigh around about them.

Captain Terror knew, in a moment, that he crossed swords with no less than the Vice-Admiral.

"You know me not, Spanish cur, but this is a debt that I'm repaying.

His blade flickered out, twirled and flashed and the Spaniard's sword spun through the air. It is doubtful that Vice-Admiral Don Alvarez de Perona de Sadista ever knew what debt he was atoning for but, in a trice, his body was run through and he lay spread eagled and dead on his wreckage strewn deck.

The battle was over.

CAPTAIN TERROR wiped the sweat from his brow and, for the first time in many weeks, he felt an

inner contentment. It was as if a great overbearing load had been lifted from his shoulders. The hate had been cleansed from his body and soul and vengeance was his.

The joyous crew overran the San Nicolas and soon brought forth her chests of pearls. The disabled Valencia ran down her flag and Captain Terror led a picked crew aboard her.

Elegantly attired once more, the Welsh pirate preserved the niceties and bowed gallantly to the bloodstained Spanish captain, refusing, however, to speak to him directly.

"The captain says that you need have no further worries for your life, sire," a roguish, Spanish speaking buccaneer translated Captain Terror's word to the thoroughly whipped Spaniard. "All we desire is your pearl cargo and then you may have your ship and begone."

Captain Terror smiled broadly, revealing his flashing teeth as the Spaniard, with a mournful look, surveyed his battered vessel. The pearls were turned over to the lean buccaneer and it was not long thereafter that Captain Terror mounted the accommodation ladder and met the nervous Duggley on deck.

"We had better get out of these waters while we are still able, Edward. The remainder of the squadron may come up at any moment."

"Aye," Captain Terror said, ruefully surveying the damage to his vessel. "Pour on the sheets and we'll be away."

Suddenly his mind reverted to the Spanish girl. Where was she? He hastily searched the tangled aftermath of the battle. She was nowhere to be

seen. With a strange feeling of worry, he hurried to his cabin and flung open the door.

The girl was stretched out face down on the window seat, her body shaking with sobs. He paused on the threshold of the cabin and the exhilaration of his vengeance drained from him like bilge water from a tapped hold.

In the heat of the battle he had forgotten her and the effect it must have upon her sensitive being. He had just killed her suitor and had wracked a bloody vengeance from her countrymen. The double realization that he loved this girl and that his rash actions must now have turned her feelings to hatred for him suddenly hurt him. Her previous behavior had only been reaction to a dangerous situation. The reality of his deeds must now make her hate him.

"Dolores," he whispered as he walked over to her prostrate figure and tenderly placed his hand upon her shoulder. "I'm sorry. I know how you feel but it was something I had to do."

Suddenly she raised her tear-stained face and looked at him. A smile appeared as if by magic and she leaped to the floor.

"I was not crying for them," she smiled shyly. "I was afraid for you, Edward. For you see, I love you."

With that she buried her head on his chest and Edward Terror embraced her in his arms.

And thus it was that, at one and the same time, Spain acquired her most relentless enemy and a certain lady of Spain acquired her most devoted lover.

THE END

WATCH FOR "SWORD OVER ISLAM"

By MAJOR MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

A flashing tale of Crusader and Saracen—against the Mongol hordes!

IT STARTED IN CHICAGO

by Berkeley Livingston

For Uranium, the metal of power, Nazis will lie and steal and murder. Bull Gowan had met them before and come out on top—to their sorrow!



I LEANED back against the ribbed back of the bench and just soaked up the sunlight. It was damned good to be alive. So what if there was only a fifty-cent piece in my pockets? And what if I had no job, or place to sleep, or a three-day growth of beard? I was free, white, and twice twenty-one, wasn't I? And this was the greatest country in the whole damned world! And weren't we about to enter the greatest era of prosperity we had ever known?

I picked up the newspaper which had fallen from my lax fingers and read the article again. There it was plain as the hair on my face. There is not the slightest question in the author's mind, but that we are about to enter a phase of prosperity which will make all previous ones look like a bargain day at Goldblatt's.

I wondered, as the paper fluttered to the ground, how much the writer got for that article. Certainly enough to get a nice steak at Barney's. It had been a long time since I'd had a nice steak at Barney's. Matter of fact it had been a long time since I'd had a beef stew at Thompsons. But I was free, white and . . .

A pair of blue-clad legs halted before me. I didn't bother looking up to know they belonged to one of Chicago's finest.

"Here for the summer?" the words stabbed me from above.

I looked up. He had a thick-fleshed, red face, small eyes set behind dewlap eyelids, and a mean mouth. The thin



My automatic spat, and the Schmeisser sub-machine gun slid out of the surprised and crazed Schmidt's hands

lips opened again and snarling words beat me:

"Why the hell do yez have to come here? Ain't Madison Street good enough for yez? Or Bughouse Square? Clutterin' up the lake front. Get yourself outa here before I t'row ya in!"

"Something wrong, officer?" the gentle voice asked.

The thin line of the cop's mouth slacked to a more agreeable expression. The man standing beside him commanded respect, the kind policemen instinctively give to all men dressed as this one was, in a suit which Duro probably made at a C note and a half, with shirts which didn't come off store counters, and shoes and hat that were made

to fit his head and feet alone.

"Yes, sir. These bums! They're beginnin' to think they c'n go anyplace."

"Very wrong of them, I'm sure," the man's so-sweet voice agreed with law-and-order. "However, from a legal point of view, if you understand what I mean, he *has* the right and privilege of the freedom of the lake front. Or am I presuming?"

I hadn't noticed his eyes before; they were turned toward the cop. Now I did. Green ice! The sunlight wasn't so hot anymore. The cop looked a little worried. Bums, he could handle. But this guy was a little out of his world. The cop shrugged his thick shoulders, twitched his lips in a smile and ambled on his way. My well-dressed protector sat beside me.

I don't know what he expected, but if it was gratitude, he was looking at the wrong gee. That's one word that ain't in my vocabulary. I suppose it makes me out to be a heel. Well, I am a heel!

"Can't say I blame you," snazzy Joe says. "It's a perfectly lovely day . . ."

He had one of those soft, voices that you imagine only women have. And a manner to go with the voice. Matter of fact, he seemed a good bit on the fruity side. The thought made me squirm.

". . . Although it seems a fruitless occupation just sitting around, looking. Don't think I'm lecturing. I believe in a man's rights, and if one of them is his choice of doing nothing in the way of labor, why, he has a perfect right to it."

"So what are you leading up to?" I ask.

"Was I supposed to be leading up to something?" he smiled. He had nice teeth, even and white, and well-kept. "Well, I wasn't. But I have been observing you. I don't really know why. You're obviously flotsam, or is it jet-

sam? Doesn't matter. Point is, I have been watching you. And I came to the conclusion that you are one of those very odd people who, though intelligent enough to reason that every human has a certain obligation to humanity, wants the other fellow to observe that obligation. Right?"

"Right. Freedom's my banner. And I wave it at every opportunity. For example, I think I have a right to tell any man to go to hell. Just like I'm telling you. Anybody ask you to come over and give me that short con about, why be a bum when there's so much work to be done?"

THAT should have scared him off.

I'm not the smallest man in the world. And I'm just as tough as I look. My eyes weren't dewey, dewey, in their regard of him. But he didn't bat an eyelid. He just smiled wider.

"Good man! I like to hear that," he says, surprisingly. "Wish there were more like you. Uh, by the way. There are some interesting ads in the paper, today. Ought to read them. Especially one on page thirty-six. About half-way down the column. Well, cheerio, and all that."

His tall frame moved away down the walk. I followed it to the point where the walk curved out of sight. Then I reached for the paper, and saw what my angel had left. A twenty dollar bill, folded in half and shoved under the cloth where my knees jammed the bench edge. I hadn't seem him put it there. Nor had I felt it. But it looked good. It could buy that steak at Barney's. Yet oddly enough, I was more interested in the ad he had talked of. I found it.

"Men wanted," it said. "Ten men, in good health. To take shipboard job. Apply, 622 Madison Street."

It was the only one he could have had

reference to. The others were for billers, clerks, and office help. Why they had placed it in that column was beyond me. It stuck out like a sore thumb. The thought came that maybe it was meant to stick out. I'm curious. I wanted to know why. So I took a walk to 622 Madison Street. It was a choice location, smack between two taverns. The drunks could roll out and pass it coming and going. There were chalked notices on the single window advertising jobs; gandy dancers for a railroad, cooks and dishwashers, somebody in Alaska wanted men on a lumber job, but about the ten men who were wanted for shipboard work there was nothing.

The interior was typical of other such places. A long counter, behind which was a blackboard, on same other jobs to be had for the asking. There was no dearth of work. There just weren't any workers. Besides myself, there was one other in the place, a short man in trousers and shirt, neither of which had been cleaned in a long time. He was standing with his back to me, and he was looking at a notice tacked to the wall at the rear. His head was thrown back exposing an oval shape of tan baldness fringed with gray hair, like a brown egg lying in a nest of gray grass.

He shook his head from side to side, shrugged his thin shoulders, and turned abruptly.

"Bull Gowan!" he bellowed.

I knew the shape looked familiar. But I hadn't seen Smitty Jerkens in five years. It's a long time in between and a lot of water had passed under lots of bridges in odd places since last we'd been together.

"Bull Gowan. Well, damn me," he continued to shout. His voice had not lost its amazing timbre. For a small man, it was always startling to hear

that voice issue from such a scrawny throat. Like a rooster roaring with a lion's voice.

His voice did more than bring memories to me. It brought from the rear, a woman. She advanced from the semi-darkness into the light and I saw that she was really a girl, and a damned pretty one.

She was wearing a rather severe suit for such a pretty girl, and her hair was piled up and braided in a golden crescent at the back of her head. Harlequins perched jauntily on a saucy, upturned nose. She had a pad in one hand and a pen in the other. Her eyebrows arched in an uneven line when she saw me.

Smitty saw my stare and turned to look. He began a slow retreat backward until he bumped against my unmoving body.

"Going somewhere?" I asked.

He mumbled something under his breath.

"I think the lady wants to ask you something," I continued.

Her lips drew downward at the corners in simulated anger. I knew it was an act, her eyes held impish laughter which was accentuated by those odd glasses.

"I certainly do," she said, "And thank you Mister Gowan. Mister Jerkens seems a little frightened by me. I don't know why," she added as an after thought. "I don't bite. And I want to help him.

"Maybe that's it," I said, "Smitty's always been a little leery of people who want to help him. It reminds him of some of the mission people he's met."

SHE trilled laughter and the sound was as out of place in that gloomy interior as it would have been in church. But I liked it. And I liked her. Although it didn't still the voice of curi-

osity which kept asking, what the devil is someone as pretty as you, as well-kept, as nice, doing here?

"I'm afraid we're not interested in his soul," she said. "It's only his body we're interested in."

This time it was she who shook her head.

"I knew that ad was worded badly," she went on. "I don't doubt that you're healthy. Only . . ."

Smitty pounced on the out.

"I know. I ain't as strong as I look. Sure. You're right miss. That job'd be too much for me."

Laughter welled in my throat. Smitty had answered the same ad I had come in response to. But the thought of his thin, underdeveloped body, and penchant for gold-bricking made me wonder what his motive was. Smitty and work in any form or fashion just weren't compatible.

"Of course," she said, her voice a little edgy, "you don't help matters by laughing. That ad's been in for three days. And he . . . Which brings you to my mind. What do you want?"

"Well, I saw the same ad. . . ."

"H'm. There's no question about your fitness. You look as though you were the right answer."

"Swell!" I said. "Now tell me what it's all about."

"I should, shouldn't I?" she said, tapping her lips with the pen. She looked down at the watch on her wrist and her lips pursed in thought. "I could," she went on. "But Mister, er, Jones will do a better job. Would you both wait for about ten minutes? I'm expecting him."

She stepped around behind the partition and Smitty and I found seats on the bench. He fidgetted as if he had an itch in an unaccessible place. He kept looking every place but at me.

"Okay, Smitty," I pinned him down. "Let's cut out the fooling. Why'd you

come here?"

He sighed windily, and gave me a wistful glance, as if he hoped I'd believe his story.

"Bull. Look. You know I'd run a mile to stay away from work. But I'm sittin' around just doin' nothin', and this character walks up to me, slips a twenty into my palm and says do I wanta work. I give him the double-o, and he's got more on him than I'll ever make, so I bend an ear. He ain't got nothin' but in the paper, he says, there's somethin' on . . ."

"I know," I says. "The same ad I answered. That's what I don't understand. Me, I look healthy. But you . . . Why'd he talk to you?"

Smitty had the right answer. That this Jones, or whatever this character's name who was coming would know. I look to where the girl is bent over a book. She had the pencil top in one corner of her mouth and looked like she was enjoying whatever she was reading, from the smile on her mouth. And again I puzzle over what the hell she's in this place for. Some things didn't stack up and I was just curious enough to follow through.

MAYBE it was ten minutes, maybe more, before a guy comes in. We didn't have to look twice to see it's Jones. Nobody but a character named, Jones, would wear a fur beaver on a hot day in August. He minced in on light feet, saw us, gave us a shy smile of greeting, and dance past until he was facing the girl. She looked up and the most wonderful smile I've ever seen lighted her face. Somehow I felt jealous. And more so when she reached over planted a kiss squarely on this guy's puss.

She murmured something I didn't get, and nodded her head in our direction. He looked toward us and I saw

the look of disappointment in his face. We'd only seen him in profile. Now in full view, he appeared to be an awful hard-looking character to be the girl's father. Unless he was her husband? But I hadn't seen any ring on her finger.

He shoved the beaver back on his head, walked over to where we were sitting, and gave us an owlish glance through horn-rimmed glasses. Smitty looked away toward me in self-consciousness, but I gave him as much as he gave me.

"The big one's all right, Jessie," he said. "But the small one's a bit on the thin side."

"Now ain't that too bad," I said.

"But," he went on, as if I hadn't said anything, "I suppose it can be made to work out. Are these two all who showed up?"

"Yes," I said. "And these two are leaving. Right now! So nobody showed up, after all. How do you like that?"

"Oh, Mister Gowan!" Jessie cried in plaintive tones. "How could you? Now see what you've done, dad!"

That put things in a different light. So the bloke was her old man. H'm. He looked like an ex-prize fighter, with his broken nose and scarred eyelids. I'd seen too many of them not to recognize an old pug. What the hell, I'd known what it felt like to have a glove full of fist working my face over.

He had the damndest voice. I tried to figure where I'd heard one like it, but it had me stumped. He kept looking from her to me, his mouth twisting and twitching in indecision. I had an idea he had a temper, and I didn't care. Matter of fact I like a fight. And a man who wants to fight. He looked like he'd like nothing better than to give me a working over. Not that he'd have a chance. I outweighed him some thirty or forty pounds and could give him ten years. But he didn't

act like he cared.

"I imagine it's up to them," he said after a few minutes of staring at me. "We can't use men who are afraid, anyway."

I knew it was an act. He said it just to get my goat. Yet I couldn't help but answer:

"Don't worry so much about our guts."

I acted as if I didn't hear Smitty beside me, say, "Nix. Nix. Bull. Don't talk us into this."

I went on. "We've got that. All I want to know is what is this all about?"

The girl answered:

"See, dad. I told you and Mister Ribins. The ad was worded badly. We don't want seamen. We want men for the plantation."

Ahh! So it wasn't seamen they wanted. And who was Ribins?

"You're quite right, Jessie. Don't blame Ribins, however. It was entirely my fault. He wanted to put the ad so. But time is passing. We've only another half hour. Suppose you gentlemen tell us, would you be willing to go to work?"

"Sure we'll tell you," I said. "Where, how, and for how much?"

"For three months. At a thousand dollars a month."

"Both of us?"

"Not him. He'd bring about fifty a week."

"A hundred," I said. "And you've got two boys. No questions, either."

It was Jessie who was happiest about the whole thing.

"Then we don't need this anymore," she said, reaching under the counter and pulling a sign out, a sign which, when she placed it upright on the counter, read, 'This Place For Rent.' "

She skipped around the rail to the door and slipped the sign between the wood and glass and turned to us with

a bright, proud smile, as if she'd done something she was very happy about. I wondered what sort of screwballs we had fallen among.

I MADE a mental tally of the things which had happened to me during the day, skipping the morning and starting with the fancy Joe and winding up with the offer of a thousand dollars a month for a job about which I knew nothing except it had to do with a plantation. Something didn't stack up. For example, the twenty dollar bill. What was that for?

The girl was standing by the door, waiting for us. I just stood around, and Smitty, following my lead, kept shifting from one foot to another, not knowing what to do except wait for me. Mister Jones kept looking at me. I could almost see his brain tick.

"By the way," he said, "how long before you're ready to leave? And do you need some money?"

I took a shot in the dark:

"No. We have twenty dollars apiece that some guy gave us. The same guy, by the way, told us about the ad."

"Interesting," Jones said in a flat voice. "We leave on the 22nd. Is there any place I can get in touch with you and your friend?"

The 22nd was two days away.

"That'd be pretty hard," I said. "Suppose I get in touch with you?"

"If you like. Superior 1818. It's an unlisted phone."

Just like that. An unlisted phone. The guy was smart. He had almost read my mind. He turned and started for the door and I stopped him before he'd taken five steps.

"Look, Jack!"

He didn't turn anything but his head.

"Yes?"

"If it isn't too much trouble, we'd sort of like . . ."

"An advance?"

"Right."

"Two hundred do . . . for both of you?"

"It will."

SMITTY JERKENS looked at the slender roll of twenty-dollar bills in obvious awe. He had never seen that much money in all his life. And half of it was his.

"Gees, Bull!" he was all excitement. "What the heck do we need to see this guy anymore? We hit him for enough. Man! A whole fish of my own. Lotsa moola, lotsa bottle stuff. Let's go!"

"You're right," I said. "We only got two days. Just time to buy the gear we need."

"Bull! You ain't . . .?"

"But I am. And so are you, Smitty. Don't be a yuk. This is chicken. Did you see the roll he peeled it off of? There was enough there to choke a horse. Three grand for a three month stretch. But does he say doing what? No. He's just keeping his nose clean till the time comes to talk. So what's on his mind? Larceny, Smitty, that's what. An' that's why he was so leary about talking. When he gets us where he wants us, then he'll open up. But then we might be top dog, mightn't we? Especially if we got something to talk with."

Smitty's mind doesn't work too fast. He was still fighting me while I went on:

"That's all right, kid. You don't have to say anything. I'll do all the thinking for us. Just like in the old days. . . ."

"But Bull . . . That's what I'm afraid of. We always managed to stay out of the cops' way, but just. I'm scared, Bull. . . ."

"Well, don't be!" I said. The gun shop was just ahead, and, while I

steered him toward it, I kept talking. "Look. The same guy walks around and meets up with a couple of characters. You and me. And he slips each of us a twenty. For what? For going down to a place on Madison Street that's a clearing house for labor. But what's in there? A cute trick in fancy glasses and a dumb manner. She doesn't know from nothing. But when the deals out, she pulls the trick card from out of her sleeve and pins it on the door.

"That joint was rented just for today. And from the looks of it, we were the only two guys who showed up. So we must be enough. Because they closed shop. So they didn't want ten guys; they just wanted two. But why us? . . . I'd like to look at a couple of items you have in the window," I break off and say to the clerk who comes up.

He gives us a slow pass with his eyes, and I burn a little. Course we don't look like ready cash, but I know this joint from the old days. Heaters could always be had here at a price.

My hand shows the edge of the roll of twenties, and his lip moves up over the moustache that almost covers it. He shakes his head, and his voice doesn't change expression as he asks:

"Yes? The items . . . ?"

"I got a nephew what collects things. His name is . . ."

"Would you mind stepping to the rear, please?" he asks.

"About this nephew?" he asks when we get to where he wants us, behind a counter stacked with luggage.

"Yeah," I said. "He collects heaters. His name's Tony. Sometimes he's called. Tony the Rod. Know him?"

"The name's familiar," the moustache says. "Heaters, eh? What kind?"

"What kind you got?"

"I got three that the serial numbers'd

be awful hard to check. One's a Luger. . . ."

"Throw that out. I don't like 'em," I said.

"So it's out. I got a .38. . . ."

"That's my baby . . . Long or short?"

"Long. . . . And I got something the cops are just starting to use, a magnum .357. Anybody gets a slug outa that, don't stand. He faws boom. . . ."

"My friend here," I said, "would like to feel that heater."

He disappears in the office for a few seconds, and when he comes out, he motions for us to follow him back in. There's a couple of guns on the desk near the wall. One of them, the magnum, looks like a miniature cannon. Smitty gets that look in his eyes. He starts walking like a sleep-walker toward it. I was always fascinated by the way he gets that pop-eyed look the second he sees a gun. His fingers claw around the stock and lift it to his hip. All of a sudden that gun looked like it was part of his right arm, a necessary part.

"A nice piece," he says in a quiet voice. "A very nice piece. And damn good balance for a heavy heat. I like it, Bull."

"So it's yours," I said. "What do we owe you?"

"One hundred dollars . . . Each," the guy said.

I gave him the whole roll and we blow the joint.

"Where you at?" I ask Smitty.

"At the Vancouver. Where the hell do you think I'm staying, the Blackstone?"

"When we get back," I said. "We'll walk over and pick your load. Then you'll come to my place, the MacVoy."

THE twenties we had left bought us a cheap pair of bags, and enough clothes to fill the grips. That was the

day after, the twenty-first. That evening I call Superior 1818. A woman's voice answered:

"Hello . . ."

"I'd like to talk to Mister Jones," I said. "Mister Gowan talking."

"Gowan?"

"Yes," I said. "It's about the ad we answered. . . ."

"Oh yes," her tone brightened and I recognized the voice then. It belonged to the girl. "Just hold on a moment and I'll let you talk to him."

A man's voice came on:

"Gowan? Where are you at?"

I told him.

"Have you packed your stuff yet?"

"Sure. We can leave tonight, if you want."

I heard him humming over the wire. Then:

"It might be an idea at that. Let me see . . . I'd rather that you didn't come here, for certain reasons. I suppose you and your friend have spent the money I advanced. . . ."

"We did," I said. He couldn't see the broad smile, and if he could have, he wouldn't have understood. "Tell you what," I went on. "There's an all-night joint that's on Wabash and Erie, a hamburger spot. I'll be there in a half an hour. Okay?"

"In half an hour," he promised.

I knew with a Superior exchange he was somewhere on the near north side, so I made it easy for him. Besides, I liked the neighborhood. It was nice and dark. And in half an hour it would be midnight. Not many people played that street at that hour. I knew what I was doing.

I was finishing my second cup of coffee. Smitty was in the darkness of an alleyway directly across the street, where he could see which way Jones went when he left. I felt someone sit in the seat next to mine. I looked up

into the mirror and saw the familiar beaver. Tonight, Jones looked a little tougher, a little younger.

He ordered a coup of coffee. And while the waiter was bringing it, whispered out of the side of his mouth:

"Put your hand down."

I did, and felt the rustle of paper in my palm.

"There's three hundred there," he whispered. "Enough to get you and your friend to Rio . . ."

I almost dropped the cup I was holding. Rio! Now what?

The waiter brought his coffee and he didn't say anything more until he was finished. I stashed the dough while he was lapping the java. When he drained the last bit, he turned directly to me and said:

"By the way, I saw your friend across the street, trying to hide behind a pole. If he doesn't want me to see him because he or you think there's some money in it, he's wasting his time. That's all there is, tonight."

"Now if you want more, listen."

"So I'm listening," I said. And I wasn't so cocky any more. This character was a long way from being a yokel.

"When you get to Rio, there's a quayside hotel called the Turino. Register. You shouldn't be longer than two weeks if you leave tonight. . . ."

"Just a minute," I broke in testily. "Where do you get that Rio stuff? How do we get visas? What about . . . ?"

"Just leave that to me, please," he said. "All that will be taken care of on your arrival. Be there at the Turino not later than the ninth of September."

"But three hundred," I objected. "That won't be enough. Hell! Train fare's about forty apiece."

"Buses are less. And a freighter leaves every day of the week for Rio

and Sao Paulo. Most of them carry passengers. Those clothes you're wearing are all right. They'll get you by to Rio and that's all I want. The rest will be taken care of later. Savvy?"

I nodded yes, walked with him to the door, and moved across the street to Smitty.

I was almost across when a car sped by behind me. I half-turned and caught a glimpse of the driver. I wasn't sure, but it could have been my friend of the twenty-dollar bills. Smitty, seeing me coming, came to meet me.

"Anything wrong, Bull?" he was worried. The magnum made a huge bulge where he'd put it in the waistband of his pants.

"Nothing," I said, taking his arm and starting down the street at a fast pace.

He gasped:

"Hey! Take it easy. The heater . . ."

I stopped. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"Damn pants won't hold it," he said.

I faced him and stepped close. "Give it to me."

He dug it out and sighed in relief as I slipped it into my pants. I started off again with him voicing question after question that got no answers. He finally got tired and shut up.

BACK at my hotel I started checking out. He worried me with more questions, but I was too busy to give him a yes or no to them. Until he asked, "What's wrong? Cops?"

I closed the grip and turned to him. His narrow-chinned, small-wedged shape face, with the pale watery eyes were staring at me in fright.

"Smitty," I asked, "did you see a Buick coupe parked near that light pole a few feet from the alley when you walked in?"

He looked away to that place in the

ceiling which would give him the answer and shook his head after a few seconds.

"Can't say I do. Guess I wasn't paying any attention."

I turned all the way around and stood up. He got a little scared at what he thought he saw in my face and took a couple of fast steps backward.

"Smitty. There's something awful fishy about this deal; I smelled it from the first and I couldn't get my fingers on it. I get that same smell now. For example, Jones knew you were waiting for him. He says he saw you; I don't believe it. I think someone else saw you and told him."

I thought; should I tell him the rest. Better not. Too smart he ain't. And the thinking end of our partnerships were always in my hands. He'll do whatever I say, anyway.

Aloud, I said:

"Might as well hit for the Greyhound depot. We're leaving tonight for Florida. Tampa. With luck, we should be in Rio in about ten days."

IT WAS closer to two weeks.

And we almost didn't make it. Rio wasn't a port of call for the Santa Locarna, the graveyard freighter we picked. But we had to put in for something. Smitty and I went over the side. It was a hell of a dark night and we'd hove in close to shore. But it was still a good mile swim to where I wanted to go. I worried about Smitty. I knew I could make it. But he said he could, too, so we took the dive from the side. All we were carrying were the guns and the clothes on our backs. I had what was left of the three bills in an oilskin folder strapped to my middle.

Rio had some of the toughest waterfront dives in the whole world. I'd been here before, and knew my way around. We were soaked to the skin

but where I was headed for no one would ask questions. All they'd be interested in would be the color of my money. And American money always brought high prices in this end of the world.

The place hadn't changed much in the four years since last I'd seen it. The same zinc bar stretching across the width, the same six tables bare of adornment, the same odor of vino, cheap Brazilian whiskey and export beer, which came in cans, and a more personal odor which had to do with sewage disposal. And as for the customers, there were some four French sailors off a Frenchy freighter who'd passed us in mid-channel, a couple of Limeys and an assortment of Brazilian stevedores and wharf scum.

Only the Europeans gave us the fish-eye as we strolled in. Our clothes were still very wet, but no longer dripping, as I'd made Smitty wait under an arch until our suits had dried somewhat. We came in and I headed for an unoccupied table. There was a one-eyed waiter I remembered from before. And he remembered me too.

"Longa time no see," he said.

He was an Italian who'd come over some thirty odd years ago, and through association with the sailors of the world had picked up enough English to get him by.

"Yeah, Nicky," I said. "How's about a couple of vinos?"

"Sure t'ing, keed. 'Ave a nicea sweem?"

I shook my head in agreement. He smiled and showed a mouthful of rotting teeth in the middle of which a gold one stood out like a blond in Harlem.

He came back with our drinks and I slipped him a buck and told him to keep the change. He damn near kissed my hand. That tip was more than he made in wages.

"Nicky," I said in a low voice. "Where's the Turino hotel?"

He gave me a sly look. Evidently it was a well-known place to him. And not exactly Kosher.

"You betcha, keed," he said. "Hey, Luigi!"

A youngster, not more than ten, stuck his head out from behind the bar at the far end. Nicky called again and the kid scrambled to his feet and came on the run to us.

Nicky spat a stream of Italian at him, to which he received nods of understanding. Then Micky turned to me and said:

"He'sa good keed. He take you there. An' forget he see you. You like dat?"

"Ve-ery much," I said, and fished another buck out of the oilskin. It was worth it.

THE Turino hotel was obviously not the finest in Rio de Janeiro. Nor even a close second. But I hadn't expected anything on the Copacabana. Rates were cheap, the equivalent to an American dollar for a large double room. I registered under my own name. We had this night and the next day. Fair enough. I had an idea that Mister Jones would get in touch with me. He did.

Smitty and I were both pooped. We hit the hay and I didn't know anything until I heard, first the voice, far away, as though from another world, then nearer, and finally a banging on the door. It was the same clerk who'd rented us the room. Even as I retreated from his vile breath, I wondered if he was on twenty-four hour duty. But he looked no sleepier than he had when he rented the room to us. Only his breath stank more. I wondered if all the inhabitants of Rio had bad teeth.

"Telephone," he said, or at least it

sounded that way.

I turned to Smitty, wiping the sleep from his eyes, and said:

"Pay dirt, fella. Be back soon."

I was wrong about the guy with me. I guess he had just come off duty because there was someone else at the desk. The day man was younger, cleaner-looking, and a lot tougher. He gave me a hard look when I walked past the desk on the way to the booth which was just beyond and to the right of where he was leaning. As I entered the booth, I caught the older man leaning across the desk. There was a sly something in his face as he whispered to the other. Then I picked up the phone and forgot about the two. It *was* Jones.

He came right to the point.

"I'm sending someone over in about an hour. Wait for him. His name is Doros. You'll understand what he's for when he gets there. I'll call you later in the day."

"What time?" I asked. "Smitty and I don't like to be holed up too long."

"Four. That be all right?"

I said, okay, and heard the click of the broken connection at the other end. Jones didn't like long conversations. I smiled to myself. There were some things I didn't like. But he'd find those out for himself, later.

As I said, the booth was to the right of and a little behind the desk. From the desk one could get a full view of anyone entering the hotel. But from the booth you just get a fast look as they come in or go out. That's what I got. A fast look at the back of a tall man, who walked with the stiff-set shoulders of an army man. The guy was wearing a white linen suit and a soft hat of light-colored material. He looked very familiar.

I stopped at the desk and leaned my weight on it. The clerk was busy at the mail slots behind the desk. His

back was to me. I grunted and he turned at the sound. His face assumed a blank look of non-interest, as he stepped forward.

HE SPOKE English, an understandable English.

"Yes?" he had a high-pitched nasal voice, that wasn't quite in keeping with his tough mug.

"Uh, that gentleman who just left. You know him?"

A Brazilian with good teeth! They sparkled in the dim light which filtered in past the screened door. The smile widened, showed more of the sparkling teeth. But the boy said nothing.

I tried again:

"The gentleman who just left. You know him?"

"No, Senhor," he said. "I do not know. But he left something for you."

"So why didn't you call me, pretty boy?" I asked.

The smile died. I guess he didn't like to be called pretty.

"You nose, she is not clean, my fran. Why you don't blow her?" he asked.

I reached across the desk with my right hand. And he stepped back, fast. His right hand made a lightning move behind him and when it came up there was a sticker with a nice clean blade in it. The blade was about six inches long, and thin as a needle.

"You like a han'kerchief?" he asked in a soft voice.

I shrugged my shoulders and moved back a little also. Sometimes it's hard to tell when a man's going to act, and this guy was pretty fast. It wasn't a throwing knife so he had to come in close. He just held the sticker up against his belly, point shoved out in my direction.

"Maybe you're right," I said. "So I'll just take what the guy left for me. Okay with you?"

"Ees hokay. I theenk we on'erstan' each other, no?"

"Yes. So just drop the billet."

It was just a square envelope with my last name scrawled across the front of it. I didn't open it until I got back in the room. Smitty was toweling his face. I washed up as best I could. A week's growth of beard isn't easy to get through. I saw Smitty was on edge, his curiosity barely contained. But at the moment all I could think of was food. The letter or note could wait.

There was a fish-place, dockside, which I remembered. It was still there.

All through our breakfast, Smitty kept giving me the eye. He saw me open the envelope and look at what it contained, and he was curious as all hell about what was in it. I didn't give in until I'd finished my second cup of coffee.

I fished the envelope from my pocket, turned it upside down and watched him as the five hundred-dollar bills fluttered to the table. His lips made fishy movements and his eyes got a lot bigger and blanker. There was a lot of dough there.

"Wha-what's that for?"

"For us, if we want it?" I said. Then I pulled the sheet of paper out and read what it said. "This could get you and your friend back to the States. It's a lot healthier there, at this time of the year."

"What's it mean?" he asked.

"I guess he means the weather's going to turn warm here," I said.

"Who's *he*, Bull?"

"Our friend of the twenty-dollar bills. He's boosted the rates to us."

SMITTY was scared. He'd been scared from the beginning.

"I don't like it! Let's scram while we got the chance."

"Y'know, Smitty," I said reflectively.

"There seems to be an awful lot of dough being thrown around on this deal. So far we just got the chicken end of it. Now they're throwing the bigger stuff. I think we'll stay a while. Maybe they'll raise the ante to where it would pay?"

"Yeah! But I don't like this town. I never did," Smitty bleated. "These mugs out here . . . They sneak around. D'ja ever see how they take care of gees out here?"

I knew what he meant. A dark street, a shadow, and six inches of steel in your back.

Instinctively my hand went to the .38 under my shirt. It felt good. I had a belt full of cartridges strung around my belly. And Smitty had a load for his magnum. Now that his clothes had dried it was impossible to make out the shape of the gun, his pants and shirt fitting as they did. Like a couple of sacks.

"Listen," I said, and he looked intently at me when he heard the undertone of menace in my voice. "I've been on the prowl a long time. There's a lot of times I could have scored big. But something always came up where the pay-off wasn't there for me. This time, I stick. These characters are in on something terrific. I got my reasons for thinking so. You can take a walk if you want. There's five bills to do it with. But I need you, Smitty. You're the best man with a heater I've ever seen. And I might as well tell you, we're going to use it someday."

"But when, Bull? When?"

That was the sore point with me. When? Was I shooting in the dark? Just what was I after? So far, it was like being part of a mirage. Would the whole thing fade away to nothing? I hadn't too much patience. But I'd lost out before when all I had to have was patience. Now I was determined to

stick it out to whatever end was going to be.

"When the time comes," I said. "And until then, let's just go along. Sooner or later, they'll have to come out in the open. That's when, Smitty."

THE rest of the day passed somehow, though the hours were like centuries, centuries in which nothing happened. Then, when I'd just about given up hope of his arrival, Doros came.

He was a little guy, maybe an inch over five feet. And he was wearing a pair of pants that bagged front and back so that he looked like he was coming and going at the same time. Though it was the beginning of the Brazilian summer, those pants were of dark, heavy material. He had a jacket on that was also dark in color but a lot lighter in weight. He'd knocked at the door, a light, indiscreet tap, and when I opened it, he stood on the threshold, a tiny man, with a woebegone, apologetic face, adorned with a pair of outsize, handle-bar moustaches. He smiled shyly, and stepped in. Behind him came another, a younger edition of himself, complete with pants and jacket and moustaches. Only the moustaches were considerably smaller.

"My eson," Doros said. "He ees photographer."

We saw then that Doros junior was carrying a tripod and camera case. Doros, himself, had only a small brief case under his arm.

They came in the room and were instantly all business. In a few moments the camera was set up on the tripod, a flashholder attached. Smitty and I lined up how junior wanted us and a half dozen shots taken of us. In the meantime, Doros senior busied himself at the small desk. He had several dark-brown leather folders in the case and while our pictures were being taken, he

filled in the pages of the folder with writing.

"Eet weel have to be dark while my eson makes op the peectures," Doros said in his low, patient voice. "Compose youselfs on the bad, please."

The whole thing didn't take more than ten minutes. Doros junior pulled the shade down took out a pan and several bottles from his case, found an unused corner of the desk and made up the prints his father needed. It was just like that, too.

As Doros handed us the folders he told us what each was for. Junior had pasted our pictures in each. As far as I could see, the firm of Gowan and Jerkens were bona-fide visitors to Brazil. Those papers would stand up under any scrutiny.

Doros sighed in satisfaction when he saw the pleased look on my face and said:

"Ees all right, no? Good! Good day, senhors."

And that was that. No money, no questions asked. Nothing. Just good-bye. Mister Jones knew his business. But where was he?

Jonesy believed in doing things on time. The clock said four, when the pretty-boy clerk called me.

And this time Jones had something definite to tell me.

"I know you waited longer than an hour," he stopped my complaining. "Doros was detained. But he fixed you and Jerkens up didn't he?"

I admitted he had.

"Good," Jones said to that. "Now listen closely. At the north end of the street on which the hotel stands, is a pharmacy. Go in there in exactly ten minutes, buy something, anything, but don't let it take over three minutes. Because exactly three minutes after you walk in there, a car will park at the curb. Time it so that you can just

walk out and into the car without wasting time. The driver will have his instructions. Good day."

I looked at the dead instrument in my hand and cursed it fully and completely. It stayed dead. I banged it onto the hook so hard I almost tore it from the fastenings. Then I walked back upstairs and told Smitty to get ready.

He wanted to know, why, since we had ten minutes.

"Because," I said, "that clerk downstairs had a funny look in his eyes when I walked out of the booth. Like he knew something he didn't think I suspected. I trust nobody around here. So let's get cuttin'."

The pharmacy was on the north side which meant we had to cross the street. It had taken us about five minutes to get out and over there. Smitty peered into the windows of the store, while I stood with my back to it. Something made me turn my head in the direction of the Turino. A low, squat car, which had police written all over it, pulled to the curb in front of the hotel, and uniformed men piled out of it. My hunch had been right. There was a switch at the desk. The clerk could listen in on all telephone conversations. It would be a matter of seconds before they'd be after us. I grabbed Smitty's arm and started for the corner.

AND a car shot up the street, drew abreast of us with screeching brakes, and ground to a halt. I saw the driver motion us in. I didn't ask any questions. Maybe it was our car, maybe it wasn't. I didn't want to know from what. It was a haven from the cops. Smitty and I piled in, me in front.

I looked in the rear-view mirror just as we turned the corner on two wheels, and saw the cops come out of the hotel.

The driver muttered something under his breath. He too, saw them.

The guy could handle a wheel like it was a part of his arm. I don't know much about the town, but I'm sure we broke every regulation in the traffic book. But after ten minutes of driving, we were in the suburban outskirts. It was a region of villas and estates.

We passed the fantastically rich Copacabana shoreline, with its magnificent hotels and gaming rooms. Now the estates were larger, more magnificent, and wider spread. I was beginning to wonder how far we were driving, when the driver turned off on a gravel road which wound among tremendous palms and feather acacias for a good mile, before we caught sight of a tremendous house on a hill. The road wound around until we arrived under the portico. A liveried servant was waiting for us. Silently, he held the door open for us, and ushered us into the cool interior.

We stood around, Smitty and I, in a reception room large enough to make it a job hearing a shout at the far end. We didn't wait long. A door opened, giving us a look at a sunny expanse of room, in one corner of which I saw a concert grand piano. And two people walked toward us.

I felt an odd twinge of something like pain, at sight of the girl who was walking by the side of Mister Jones. She was dressed in a white skirt whose sides were slashed in red. A red and white halter held her breasts firmly. She walked with a wonderful grace. And that golden swirl of hair flowed in loose waves over her shoulders.

They stood before us, the girl smiling brightly in greeting, Jones looking a little more glum than when we had seen him last.

"So the police arrived just as you left. H'm. I'd hoped we would have more

time," Jones said.

"I'm certainly glad to hear that," I said, sourly. "I wouldn't mind a little less mystery."

"Some of the mystery will be lessened as soon as my associate arrives. Please be seated. He should be here presently."

It wasn't more than five minutes, and we heard the sound of a car pulling into the gravel of the driveway. The same servant opened the door and a man walked in. The light was strong behind him, and for a few seconds after the door was closed, I couldn't see him clearly. But when my eyes were able to focus clearly I recognized him. It was our friend, the one who'd passed out the twenty-dollar bills.

He just stood there, smiling down at us. Then he said:

"My. It certainly is a long way from Chicago, isn't it?"

"It's even," I said, "a long way from the Turino hotel."

Those green eyes went wide, and he stepped a little closer.

"Turino hotel?" his voice hadn't changed. It was still high, like a woman's. "I don't understand. What about the Turino?"

But Jones wasn't having any part of my personal quarrel. He must have understood the sudden tension in the air, because of a sudden he was between us, and facing me.

"That can wait," he said.

"Maybe it can't. Maybe it might be too late. I want to know what he was doing at the Turino."

"I'd rather," Jones said, "tell you what you're doing here."

"Now *that*," I said, "will make good listening. Go on."

He smiled and jerked his head for Ribins to take a seat. The girl had found a love seat facing me. The smile had left her face. It was oddly serious,

now.

"To start at the beginning," Jones said, "I went to a lot of trouble finding you and your friend. You see, you weren't just brought to our attention by some odd coincidence. No. Our work will have too many important bearings to be left to the vagaries of chance.

"For example. Your history; James Frank Gowan, about forty years old, three years at Carnegie, war breaks, you get married, go overseas, receive many citations for bravery and gallantry, and come home to find the woman you have married is not the faithful, loving kind. That divorce you got was the first step in the downward path you deliberately chose. I wasn't concerned with the moral issues involved. I delved only into the facts of the case.

"Prohibition came on, and James Gowan became a lone wolf gangster, whose only companion was one, a man named Smitty. Gowan lasted for a few years, until the gangs became syndicated under various heads. Gowan would not be forced to pay tribute, so he fought them. It was a losing battle, and on a trumped-up charge, Gowan was sent to jail on a manslaughter charge, which two years after his imprisonment, was proved and Gowan was set free.

"GOWAN left the country then and for ten years traveled about the world. We know that some of the time he spent in China. Three years were spent in Germany. Those years we are certain of. We also know you," for the first time he directed his remarks to me directly, "left Germany on request, because you didn't like the government's ideas of some things.

"The last conflict came on and Gowan tried to enlist. Although he was within the age limit and had an

enviable record in the last war, he was refused. There's a gap there which we cannot explain, a gap in which your life became a blank, as far as our investigation shows.

"The war ended and we picked up the trail of James Gowan again. I won't bother you with the past year and a half's details. Which brings us up to the present. The reason why you and your friend are here."

They had covered my life pretty well. And as they said, there were gaps which must have made them despair. It was a strange search they'd gone through. But why? For what? And why me?

Jones went on:

"So it was that the twenty-dollar bill was not placed where it was by chance. Nor was the ad called to your attention because of a wild hope you'd answer. We knew our man pretty well. Both of you."

I was curious about Smitty. What had he to do with it?

"Your friend," Jones replied to my question, "is a prime factor in our plans, also. Although he is a coward in every sense of the word, and completely lacking in responsibility, he will follow you to death's doorstep. And beyond, if need be.

"He will do anything you want him to. . . . Because you spent two years in jail because of him. It was he who committed the killing, a deserved killing. I know. The evidence proved it. That was why you were freed and why he didn't go to jail. Which brings up the point of his being here.

"As I said, his cowardice is a proven thing. But give the man a gun and he becomes the bravest man in the world. So we are going to use his very odd ability . . ."

All this was a little boring, now. History, even mine, acted that way on

me. I wished he'd get to the point. I prodded him:

"Very interesting, my friend," I said. "You're going to use Smitty because he's a fast man with a gun, and me because I spent ten years abroad and went to Carnegie when I was a kid and got a few trinkets out of the last war. Very interesting. What's the real angle you and this joker are working on?"

"Oh," Jones said smilingly. "You were not alone in our consideration. You were the last screening, the final assay, if I may coin a phrase . . . ?"

"Why not? There's no law against it," I said sourly.

". . . The proven equation," Jones went on. "You were, in a sense, the perfect choice. But we had to approach you as we did, because knowing the sort of man you were, if we simply came to you and said, look, Gowan, here's a chance to make ten thousand dollars, you'd probably say, stick it. So we used guile, trickery. You saw through it, as we knew you would. But you were interested, as we also knew you'd be. That's why you came here. Because at heart you're an adventurer. Gowan, this may be the greatest adventure of your whole checkered career."

Toward the end he got to breathing heavy. The somber glance of his eyes changed to a something heated, excited. They flashed with an odd fire. The whole room was charged with his excitement. Even the girl, whose glance had been watchfully curious, became tense; she sat more erect, her eyes never leaving her father's intent face.

"Gowan!" his voice throbbed my name. "You made an odd statement once. Your words were the deciding factor in our choice. You said, 'It's easy to die, most of us have no choice in the matter. But we have a choice in the living. I'd rather live for a something valid, so that when the time

comes for the dying, I can say I am not dying because there was nothing to my living.' ”

This guy really knew a lot about me.

“I’m going to give you a chance to prove that,” Jones went on. “To talk your language, I’m letting you in the biggest thing you ever dreamed of.

“My name, as you suspect, is not Jones. I won’t give you the complete thing; simply I am Senhor Gonsales, a Brazilian by birth and a patriot by training. You must understand that, in order to appreciate my position. Previous to the last war, Brazil had an unenviable lack of something called moral code, in its dealings with other nations. But, and the reason for the change cannot be told, something happened to factors in the government. Our position has changed. We are not a nation destined for greatness, except in the hemisphere. And I can contribute toward that greatness.

“**T**HROUGH the co-operation of the United States, both governmental and private, certain natural resources have been opened for use. The engineers have gone home. These resources now belong in their entirety to our country and to the citizens who own them. It is up to us to use them in the proper manner and to the right ends. Some of them will not and are not being used to that end.

“We are surrounded by nations who have irons in the fire which will be used for malignant purposes. They do not want Brazil to be great, except that only through their control. Already some of our agencies are shot with corruption because of these nations. I will not be a tool in their hands. I will not be a tool in the hands of any corrupt people. What I own in the vast hinterland will be developed for the great good. And you will help me. It is go-

ing to take a man, men, who have no fear in their souls. Men who *will* go through hell for a principle, a principle of right. And there is no doubt but that these people who are evil will seek to prevent, to destroy, and to make useless my purpose.

“Gowan! Deep in the heart of Brazil is a vast land of undeveloped wealth. There are a thousand men there, natives it’s true, but men I can trust, who are ready to work for me. But surrounding my lands are the robber barons. They will do all in their power to stop you. Are you willing to risk your life, and the life of your friend?”

I sighed in relief. God! What a character! I thought he was going non-stop. If it had been anyone but me, he’d of been talked out of it. Some men just didn’t know when to stop talking. Jones was one of those guys. He had to get in the last words, the kind to kill the sale. I’d been sold from the first. But . . .

“Okay,” I said in resigned tones. “I’ll take a chance. But get this! I’m not doing it from any pap reason or patriotism. The moola is all I’m interested in. Now tell me what, where, and how we get there. And please, a little less, if you can manage, flipping with the lip.”

It was as if he had suffered shock. His face paled, then reddened in anger. His eyes widened until they were almost perfect circles, then narrowed to slits. I saw his throat work on words which I’m sure would have torn me to shreds were they possible to have done so. But nothing happened, only the sudden trill of the girl’s laughter. It rose on the air, made the whole show a thing of frivolity, and sent the look of grimness from her father’s face. ♣

“Oh, dad,” she thrilled. “He is *so* right. You *do* go on, like an intermin-

able river. The words just wash over you and pretty soon you don't know what went on before, because it's all just talk. Why not just tell Mister Gowan where the mine is, and what he's got to look forward to."

"Not much," Ribins contributed his bit drily. "Heat, danger and natives who don't know the meaning of discipline. On top of that he'll find the opposition . . ."

"You mentioned them before," I said. "Just what or who are they?"

Jones took it from there:

"The Brazilian Mining Syndicate. They have a government option on ten thousand acres of mountain in an area adjoining my holdings."

"So what's their angle?" I asked.

"I'M SORRY, Jessie," Jones cast an appealing glance at his daughter. "I'll have to go into details again. To begin with, Gowan, you have to understand that Brazilian mines are invariably located in the most inaccessible places. The whole region is a mass of twisted rock, wild river gorge, and dense forest, some of it impossible to go through. There's a small-gauge railroad which goes to within ten miles of my holdings. From there it's river work. Ribins, here, had a dozen wooden scows built which will accommodate the mined ore. The road takes it to the smelter. The points of danger lie from the mine to the river to the road. I have armed guards on the freights. But many men have died. You see, my competitors mines are not as productive by a long way. So if they can force me to close, they will have a monopoly. . . ."

"I get it," I said. "I'm being hired as a strong man and big stick. And if somebody gets hurt that'll be all right too, eh? Right?"

"Only," Jones said, "if they attack

first. Under no circumstances are you to provide the incentive for open warfare."

I shook my head savagely.

"Sorry," I said. "I don't operate that way. They don't get a chance on getting a couple of fast pitches past me. Those pitches can mean everything. I want full authority."

It was our first clash. It had to come sooner or later. I'd let a lot of things ride, because, as he had figured correctly, I was curious. But now I knew where we stood. And it was going to be my kind of game or else . . .

Gonsales, I liked Jones better, bit his lip, looked from Ribin to his daughter, and finally back to me. He nodded and said:

"Very well. You have it. Now suppose you and your friend come with me, and I'll give you the layout and final instructions."

The whole gang of us followed him up a winding staircase which led to a balcony. We walked part way around the balcony and went out of a door which led to a sun roof. There was a magnificent view of the sea from the roof. I hadn't noticed but mine host's house rested on the side of a cliff. We made ourselves comfortable in deck chairs placed around a gigantic table covered in a beige leather. There was an immense globe in the center of the table and I noticed that a map of Brazil, blown up, was tooled in the leather. Jones sat on the table and called me over.

He'd taken a pointer from some recess in the wood and pointed to an area marked off in red, on the map.

"Here," he said, "is your destination. I'm telling you now, so that if by some chance there is a slip-up, you can get to the spot. And by the way, my daughter will accompany you. . . ."

I gave her a look of astonishment.

This beautiful creature going with us. Incredible! She was as much in place in the jungle as an anaconda on Michigan Boulevard.

"... as will Ribin. And I do hope you will settle any differences you may have. . . ." I made a mental note of that. I was certainly going to do that little thing. Only it might not be the way Jones wanted. "... another thing. My chauffeur informed me that the police had arrived when he got there. Evidently our friends have notice of you. For the next two days you will spend here. I'm having a tailor come up who will take your sizes in the wear you'll need. And if stores can supply them you'll leave then. If not we'll have to have clothes made to order."

THE stores had our sizes.

I sat in the rear of the car with Ribin and Jessie. Smitty sat up front with the driver. Our bags and heavy gear had been shipped ahead. We were dressed only in tropicals. But strapped to Smitty's and my shoulders were the neatest spring holsters imaginable. It was a thing of wonder to watch Smitty draw that hunk of artillery. Greased lightning!

Brazilian railroads are a joke for the most part. Small gauge tracks, wooden coaches, obsolete equipment make up the bulk of the roads, the rest being modern. We got a modern, streamlined affair of gleaming steel. It would take us to within a hundred miles of our objective, the jungle rail head.

Jones had reserved three staterooms. Smitty and I shared one, and the girl and Ribin had their own. Smitty and I went immediately to our own. Smitty had almost gotten over the feeling of amazement that all this was happening to him. But the sight of the luxurious appurtenances of the stateroom almost

took his breath away.

"Gees! Will you take a gander at this stuff," he said, pointing to the thoroughly modern styling and layout. Most of Smitty's traveling in previous times had been by bus or at best on a coach.

Our three staterooms adjoined, Jessie's being the last in line.

Smitty and I made ourselves comfortable. Rio gets pretty damned hot in September. And although we were wearing lightweight tropicals, I was in a deep sweat, as was Smitty. We removed our jackets and shoes and stretched across the double lounge in the most comfortable positions we could find. Our rest was not for long, however.

There came a knock at the door, the kind porters are given to, and at my grunted invitation to enter, the door opened and it was the porter.

He babbled something in Portuguese at me, to which I replied first in Italian, then Spanish. The second language brought enlightenment. There was a gentleman who wanted to see us. I told the porter to bring him forward. Spanish is a very formal language. One is brought forward, not told to come in.

He was a little guy, all smiles and pointed moustache which was waxed to gleaming, spiked points. He crossed the threshold, clicked his heels and bowed.

It was too hot, and too comfortable on the lounge for me to do more than say, "What can we do for you?"

The smile grew broader, more fixed. "Yankees! Always to the point. Business first. I like that."

"That's nice," I said. "To business, alley oop!"

"Soo!" he said. And looked around for a seat. There was none, so he sat gingerly next to Smitty's relaxed skinny frame. He smiled once more, again in

apology. The boy had 'em on tap, like the records in a juke box. Only we didn't need any nickels.

"Gentleman! I have come to make you an offer. Would you, sir, be interested in making twenty-five thousand dollars?"

He was talking to me. But it was Smitty who whistled.

I discovered our slick friend could frown too. Or maybe he thought Smitty was whistling at him.

"I, sir," I said, "would be interested in making a lot less. But you make it sound so good. Twenty-five grand. A lot of spinach. What do I have to do to make that moola, kill the Brazilian army?"

He got up at that, and came over and sat at my side. Maybe Smitty *was* whistling at him. I didn't like the smell of his cologne. It was too, *too* sweet.

He bent low, and the familiar odor of garlic enveloped me. Whispering in a low, hoarse voice, like the villain in a showboat horse opera, he said:

"If you get off at Sao Paulo and walk up to the refreshment stand near the entrance to the station the man will hand you a bundle of something. This bundle will contain . . ."

"Something for Britain," I said smartly.

Smitty thought it was funny, too. He cackled in hoarse laughter which is as close to the bray of a jackass as is possible for human throat to utter.

The mysterious stranger's lips tightened and he jerked back from me as though I had attempted to bite him.

"You are fooling me!" he was insulted at the thought.

"Mister," I said. "I'm not fooling with you at all. But what sort of line are you handing me? Get off at this spot and a man will hand me a bundle. Talk sense. Why should anyone hand

me anything?"

"Maybe because they want you should be a good boy," our character says in a snooty tone.

"And do what?"

"Stay away from the mountains. The sea has nicer scenery."

"I get sea sick," I said.

"You might get mountain sickness where you're going," the boy said. "I hear it's a sickness that proves to be fatal in most cases."

THERE'S one thing about the American scene. When somebody talks tough, they say what's on their minds in no uncertain terms. I'd learned in my travels about that in other countries, the tough babies talk in roundabout ways, although the letter of their threats are the same. I like the American manner best.

He was too small a guy for me to get rough with. Besides, I wanted to see his big brother, or whoever had sent him. So instead of throwing him out, I played a game with him.

"Suppose we wait till we get to Sao Paulo before I let you know what I'm going to do?" I asked, and shoved him from the edge of the bed.

He smiled with his lips but his eyes flashed me a warning. And as he opened the door, he turned his head toward me and said, in a low, gentle voice, like a caress from a snake. "My friends would be very angry if the bundle were not picked up."

He closed the door behind him, like a gentle period.

"Twenty-five G's," Smitty murmured ecstatically.

"A lot of dough, isn't it, fella?" I said.

"Y'know, Bull, I like this country," Smitty said, rolling over on his back and smiling to the ceiling.

I agreed with him. It was a nice

country. Hospitable, generous. And of course we were going to pick up that bundle.

Smitty moved only his head, when I said that.

"Now, Bull," he said placatingly. "Don't get any fancy ideas. We can blow off and nobody'd be the wiser. Let's just grab while we got the chance. I didn't like what this Gonsales jerk was saying a few days ago."

"Yeah. But look at the clothes you got. And this fancy travel. Why we're in class," I said.

He knew then that I wasn't having any of our visitor's apples. I didn't like the stand they were on.

"About the dough," I said. "We'll pick it up, all right. Who said we wouldn't? Only we'll just go right on about our business. If they don't like it they can sue us."

He groaned aloud.

"Nix, Bull, nix. We got troubles now. Let's either take it and scam or leave it. But no double-cross."

"It's the only language they understand around here," I said. "Besides, it'll show them where I stand. I like to see who and what I'm fighting."

IT WAS hotter than Tampa in hurricane season, in Sao Paulo. Smitty and I stood around mopping our brows, while Jessie and Ribins went to see about the transfer tickets. I kept the ole eagle eye out for our friend of the sweet perfume. He seemed to have gotten lost in the rush. There were many small men about, all of them in some sort of rush to get somewhere. It was a strange thing about South Americans. They were always on the move.

Smitty nudged me.

"Hey, Bull. Look over there." He pointed toward the refreshment stand.

The little guy was there. He was looking in our direction. The second

he saw us look toward him he ducked around the side. But I felt sure that he was somewhere where he could see us and what we did. I started toward the stand, Smitty on my heels.

There was a fat guy in a grease-stained jacket holding a paper in his hand. He wasn't looking at anyone in particular, just yelling his papers to the general public. I marched straight up to him and just stood there.

His eyes looked everywhere but at me. Then he saw me and a slow grin crooked his lips. He shoved the paper at me. I shook my head. His free hand passed over his wares and again I shook my head. Solemnly, he nodded and dipped with his arm below the rim of the stand and came up with a flat paper parcel, wrapped in brown craft paper. His head jerked for me to step closer. There was no one else near the stand when he passed the slender parcel across to me. I shoved it into my inside jacket pocket, turned and walked away. The whole thing was done in pantomime. Not a word was spoken.

I didn't see the little guy though I kept an eye out for him. Yet I felt he was somewhere around and keeping watch. I smiled to myself.

Ribins and Jessie were waiting for us. He looked a little petulant and a whole lot hot. Jessie was just as calm and cool as a painting of Lake Como.

"Aah. I knew you weren't far off," she cooed, as we came up.

"Hrumph!" Ribins wasn't pleased at all. "Can't you stay in one place?"

"My feet get too hot," I said. "Besides, Smitty wanted something to drink."

"I can't blame Smitty," Jessie said, dimpling a smile at him. "I wouldn't mind one myself."

Ribins looked at his watch. "Well. We've two hours. Why don't you and Gowan find a cool spot? I'll run over

to see a friend in the meantime."

It was a swell idea, so I said. Jessie agreed. We parted on good terms. For the first time I felt Ribins wasn't a bad sort at all.

But how to get rid of Smitty?

THERE were two things Smitty liked to do better than anything else, drink and sleep. There was no place for him to sleep and I didn't like the thought of having him along. Smitty solved the problem himself. He'd been eyeing the opening of a shop directly across from the station. A large bottle proclaimed it to be a tavern of sorts. There was a more elaborate place in the station, but Smitty liked the cheaper bars. His tongue flicked out and licked his lower lip. I shoved him toward the exit, although he made a half-hearted attempt to shy away. I watched him make for the joint and turned to find Jessie looking at me. She shook her head in amusement.

"You don't have to act as though you hated to see him go. Because, mentally, you've been shoving him along ever since I suggested a drink."

"That's what I like about you. You perceive things so quickly," I said.

"Is that bad?"

"Depends on what you see," I said.

"Only what I want to see, I assure you," she said.

"Then let's hope you don't see too much, or at least nothing incriminating."

"Then don't do anything you don't want me to see," she said in smiling finality. "Suppose we get that drink? My throat's a bit on the parched side."

I took her arm and led her through the entrance of a lounge which was part of the station. As I opened the glass door I saw reflected in the glass the figures of two men walking swiftly toward the lounge. One of them was

the little guy, the other a burly giant whose features were blurred.

Jessie walked on a few steps, then seeing I was no longer at her side, turned and regarded me with a quizzical look.

"Aren't you coming?" she asked.

I shook my head in reply and followed her to a table in a corner, beneath a live palm. She had picked an inconspicuous place where we could see yet be not too much a part of the crowd while filled the place. There was a small band on a raised platform, and the small circular bar had a full complement of patrons.

A waiter hurried over, took our orders; she wanted a sherry, and scurried away, all in such quick steps it seemed he had a train to catch. We smiled into each others eyes as we watched the man depart.

"Let's not rush," she said. "After all, I've been wanting to be alone with you for a long time now. Ever since, in fact, I saw your bearded face in that horrible little store we rented on that street in Chicago."

"I'm flattered," I said, falling in with her mood. "Was it the amount of hair on my face which interested you?"

"N-no, it wasn't the hair. It was that lay beneath it."

"My mask!" I pretended horror. "You saw beneath the mask! A terrible fate lies in store for you. It is well-known that . . ."

A soft, womanish voice intruded:

"Senor Gowan! How nice. May I . . . ?"

It was the little guy and his big friend. The big one didn't impress me as the intellectual kind. He had a glum, unhappy look on his flat face. Jessie gave me a raised-eyebrow look. The little guy kept smiling.

"Not," I said, "unless you wanted to get your teeth kicked in."

I guess he didn't hear or understand me, because he started to pull out one of the two extra chairs. I didn't shove hard; he *was* small, but he went skidding all the way to the bar, a good twenty feet from our table. He screeched something I heard all the way where we were sitting, and the big guy bent down and put out a paw the size of a small watermelon.

I didn't know what his intentions were, nor was I going to ask. I just shot both hands, knuckles toward each other, and grabbed his thumb in one hand, and little finger in the other and pulled outward.

They snapped with the sound of sticks breaking, and I kept right on applying pressure. He went all the way to his knees before I released him. Then I kicked the chair from under me, got up and smacked him across the jaw.

It was a mistake.

He had a jaw that felt when I hit it like I'd hit the side of a barn. And it made that much impression on it. Before I knew what happened, his left hand came around and took me under the knees. He swept me down to the floor beside him, only I landed on the back of my head. There were a million shooting stars traveling around me, like a spangled halo, when I hit. But I don't stay out long from a bump like that.

Instinctively I rolled my head like when a punch is coming you can stop. But this big guy didn't know from punches. He had a pair of big hands and they were supposed to strangle a guy. That's what he knew. The jerk was dragging me toward him with his free hand. I rolled closer and threw a pair of stiffened knuckles straight into his Adam's apple. It sent his head back, but that one hand still dragged me. His other was useless with a pair

of broken fingers. I managed to draw my knees up a little so I could apply leverage, but before I got into position he drew me all the way in and I lay in his grip like a mouse in an anaconda's mouth.

I CHOPPED in with my elbow. His belly had more muscle than a strong man at a circus. He was breathing so hard my hair was blowing in my eyes, blinding me and the motion of the big chest against mine was like a bellows. There was only one thing left, my choppers, though I knew they weren't much use. It was then I heard Jessie's voice, and throwing my head back as far as it would go, I saw her bent over him. She was telling him something in a clear calm voice. But it was in Portuguese. And I don't understand the language. What I did understand, was the sliver of glass she held at his throat so hard a trickle of blood flowed down his neck.

Jessie had broken the sherry glass and the stem, sharp as a needle would have driven a neat and deadly hole in him if he didn't say uncle.

His hands relaxed and I scrambled erect. I wasn't worried about him. It was the little guy who had me worried. I knew his type. There was usually a knife concealed somewhere about the premises. Jessie could handle the big lug. I was right, and just in time. The little guy was coming in for the kill, a sticker in his meat hook all raised for the coup de grace. Only he made the mistage of stabbing downward. He should have known better than to try that with a guy who knows judo.

I stepped in, swung with him and let the knife pass over my shoulder, and as it passed I grabbed his wrist and twisted, but with all my strength.

He screeched like a woman, in his agony. The knife clattered to the floor, and I swung downward at the same

time. He knocked over two tables and ended up in a screaming heap under a third.

Then I pivoted on the big guy still laying in fear of his life with the glass sliver sticking almost in his throat, and kicked him as hard as I could in the neck. A pulpy lump, as big as my fist, was raised by the kick. It also knocked him cold. Jessie grimaced in disgust at the sight. But I wasn't interested in her feelings. I just wanted out. I grabbed her hand and literally pulled her along, after me. The patrons of the lounge were already losing their lethargic terror at the odd turn of affairs. And I knew it would only be a matter of seconds before the familiar shouts, screams and loud-voiced calls for the police would sound throughout the place.

Cops and mayhem don't mix. They pull you in first, *then* ask questions. I knew I couldn't supply some of the answers.

The girl balked at being dragged from the place, although she felt the urgency of our getting out. Still, she wanted to get to the bottom of what had happened. She kept dragging behind until I was forced to yank at her arm.

"I don't want any cops around," I growled at her. "I'm carrying a gun that will take a lot of explaining."

She came easier then.

I didn't stop when we hit the inside of the station. The street looked better from where I was sitting. I let go her hand and continued at a fast walk for the nearest exit. She followed. When we reached the sidewalk, I waited a few seconds. I knew Smitty, and knew he'd be sitting facing either the door or an outside window. Sure enough, we hadn't been standing for more than a few seconds when he came trotting out. I waved him on. His hand was held high toward that gun in

the shoulder holster. Smitty didn't know the niceties of mayhem. He was pure gunman.

"Grab a cab," I said to Jessie, "and tell him to go anywhere. Once we're in, we'll think of what to do."

I had to hand it to her. No questions. She stepped to the curb and held up a gloved hand and at the signal a cab that was the granddaddy of all cabs ground to a panting halt in front of us.

Smitty was all excitement. He kept looking from the girl to me, his weak, watery eyes begging for information. Jessie had given the driver his instructions and after that had retired into a shell of injured futility. For I didn't give her the immediate satisfaction she thought she should have; I knew she thought at least an apology was in order. It could wait. First I wanted space between us and whoever was on the lookout for us. I felt that the little guy was only a small wheel.

I KEPT looking out the rear window until I drove both Smitty and the girl to frantic finger-biting worry. All I would say was, "Tell him to drive around. And not in a straight line."

Sao Paulo isn't laid out for straight-line driving. I didn't have to worry on that account. Still a good ten minutes of driving was necessary before I felt safer. Then I leaned back and sighed in satisfaction.

She turned on me then, like a little cat who'd been bilked of its milk.

"Darn you! You've got a lot of nerve ordering me around that way. Just what did you think you were doing, starting a fight with that big brute. He didn't do anything. And kicking him when he was down. The least you could have done was let him get to his feet. . . ."

"And give him a real chance to murder me," I said sarcastically. "Not

Bull Gowan, lady. I've been in too many brawls, ever to let a man, especially one who was as big as that guy was, get to his feet. Besides," I came to the point which she'd left so quickly, "I thought I was boss man of this deal? Because if I'm not, we can call it quits right now."

"Oh don't be such a fool," she said. "Of course you're *boss*! Such a word! Though *you* like it well enough. But just because you are doesn't mean that willfulness is going to be your forte."

I'd won my point and I was satisfied. So let her have her small inning. I had the game.

"I am sorry about that," I said. "But there was no time for explanations back there. All I wanted was to get you out of that danger zone."

"Now just hold on to your horses for a few seconds while I examine a package I've got. Then I'll explain."

That damned Manila envelope was burning a hole in my pocket. There were two things in the wrappings. A thin bundle of hundred dollar bills, twenty-five of them, and a letter or rather, note. I read the note aloud:

"Please accept this as compensation for the trouble you've had. There will be no further incidents if you use the money wisely. Understand?"

Smitty and the girl looked at each other. I was busy examining the bills. They were clean. If there were any markings, I couldn't see them. Of course they were hundred-dollar notes. And those kind, I was sure, had their numbers known at the treasury offices in Rio. These boys weren't missing out on any bets.

"All right," I said. "Here's what happened . . ."

"But why did he follow you?" she asked after I told how the little guy had approached us.

"I guess he wanted to make sure we

understood him. Your being there didn't bother him. He thought I was their boy. After all, I was a heel, and he knew it when I accepted the bribe. So what was the difference if you knew it? There wasn't anything you could do about it."

"But what are you going to do with the money?" she asked.

"Keep it."

"But . . . But that's not honest."

"Oh, let's not talk like that," I said in disgust. Where did she get that way. Who among us was being honest?

"But we've got to," she persisted. "So much depends on it."

"I'm here, aren't I?" I asked.

"The money . . ."

"Suppose we forget it," I said. "Besides, I want them to know where I stand. That was the first open sign of our friends. I want to see more of them."

SHE bit her lip in exasperation. I guess I was foreign to her. Maybe the boys she'd been running with were a lot different. They probably were. She was beautiful. And men get kind of slappy around dames like that. Not me. I have more things on my mind than curves, even when they were the kind she had.

Smitty had started to rub his hands at the mention that I was going to keep the dough. He liked that. Sometimes I thought he was goofy, the way money acted on him. Because he never spent it any place but in a rum joint. Well, he was going to sober from now on. If I knew my hoods, these guys weren't going to like being taken. Not for that kind of moola, anyway.

Jessie smiled, a kind of wistful smile, and said:

"Are we to ride around like this all day? I just told the driver to take us around the water front."

"Fair enough," I said. "We've still got better than an hour. What's worrying me, is how are we going to get back to the station without being seen."

"We don't have to go back to the station," Jessie announced unexpectedly. "The train makes all stops from Sao to the point where we will meet the river boat."

"So that," I said continuing her line of reasoning, "all we have to do is drive down to the next stop on the line and meet the train. Right?"

She shook her head.

"But what about Ribin? Not that I give a hang about whether he meets us or not."

"You don't like him," she said, more to herself than to me. "Why? What has he done to you?"

"I just don't trust the guy," I said. "And don't ask me why. I can't supply a reason except intuition. . . ."

Her mouth opened and her eyes sparkled in womanly venom. I didn't give her a chance.

"So okay, intuition isn't a good reason. But I notice you gals use it on the slightest excuse. Particularly when there isn't a logical answer to a question. He's too smooth, Senhor Ribin. Too sure of himself. Why? How is he stacked up in this deal?"

Her eyes threw a question at me.

"Where does he and your father fit together?" I went on.

"Ooh! It was he who had the idea. And papa, who is the soul of generosity, is allowing him a half share in the project. Of course he has nothing to lose if things turn out badly. But he certainly has more to gain if they *do* work out."

Some more double-talk. In the three days we'd spent at the Gonsales' villa I'd never found out exactly what it was they were searching for in the mountains. These Brazilians had a marvel-

ous faculty of not meeting an issue squarely. I looked at the girl beside me. She was dressed in a cotton dress with a low square collar. It had wide, flaring skirt which swished about as she moved her long legs when walking, and gave the effect that she was about to take off. Her hair was bound in a brightly colored bandana wound about turban-fashion. She wore no stockings. And her legs were well-tanned.

I felt a vast sense of irritation with her suddenly. She and Candide. The most perfect of worlds. And everything would turn out for the best. There was no medium. All nicely in categorical catalogues. He was good. He was bad. No in-betweens.

"Did you ever think that bread can be buttered on both sides?" I asked.

"Then it'll get dirty whichever way it falls," she said.

"True. But one doesn't have to eat butter. It can be licked."

She mulled that one over.

"No. I think you're wrong. I mean about Mister Ribins. I think I'll trust papa's judgment there."

"Aah! Let's skip it," I said. "How about figuring an angle on letting him know what we intend doing?"

"Oh, that's simple. I'll tell the driver to stop at the next telegraph office," she said.

IT WAS a twenty mile drive to where we met the train. And this train wasn't the elegant affair of streamline design which we'd used to get to Sao Paulo. There was only one kind of accommodation, bad. Ribins was fuming. We saw his face in a window as we walked down the wooden ramp to the train.

"What happened?" he barely waited till we were comfortable before bursting out with the question. It was the first time I saw him angry.

"Nothing," I said in bland answer. I knew it would make him more furious. "I thought since we had two hours, I'd see the town. So we got a hackie to take us around. Time went by and we forgot, that's all."

Jessie shot me a glance of fury, and got a grin for reward.

"Why?" I asked. "What's there to worry about?"

"Worry about? You don't know these men! They'll stop at nothing. Do you hear? Nothing? And you ask why I worry. Suppose . . ."

"Aah. Suppose . . . Stop beating your gums, you'll get pyorrhea that way. Nothing happened and we're here."

He was breathing like he'd been running a race with himself. Slowly he let his head fall back against the cushion and regarded me through half-closed eyes. One more I got the impression of green icicles. Warmth and icy reserve. He wasn't the kind to give way to his emotions. I liked him less than before.

He leaned forward a trifle and spoke directly to me:

"From here in we are entering a land of danger. The further we go the greater the danger. Let us have one thing in mind. That if we are not concerned too greatly about our objective, we have Miss Gonsales to protect. One too many chances and her life is a stake in this game. And I repeat, they'll stop at nothing."

"So knowing that, why did her father permit her to come along?" I asked, reasonably. "And since he did, I think she should accept the consequences. Right?"

"Right," Jessie said emphatically. "You know why I'm along, John. . . ." I hadn't heard him called anything other than Ribin, before . . . "and father, I and you discussed the whole

thing. So let's not have any odd notions of chivalry entering at this stage of the game."

"Very well, Jessie. Nevertheless . . ."

"Let's talk of something else," she said. "Is Jose to meet us at the landing?"

Ribins shook his head in the affirmative.

"I do hope our gear will be there," she said. "Although there isn't any reason it shouldn't be."

Ribins was positive on that score. "We shipped in plenty of time. Unless . . ." he had to qualify.

"Let's not build obstacles," I said. "It's a bad habit."

There was silent agreement and we made ourselves as comfortable as possible in a growing heat. Jessie leaned back against the seat cushion and closed her eyes. Ribins once more found repose sitting straight back, his eyes half-closed again, and peering into mine from under the slightly parted lids. Smitty curled up and slept, his mouth falling open and after a few minutes, snoring at a great rate. I found sleep impossible for some reason.

The miles went by in green profusion. The track had been cut through sheer jungle land and at times the jungle intruded almost to the point where the train seemed to be running through a green tunnel of verdure that never ended.

Every now and then the train would stop, usually at a station which looked like it had fallen asleep along the tracks and only woke when the train arrived. But sometimes we'd stop because the track was blocked by livestock. I noticed after several hours that the flatland was becoming hillier. And soon the hills became higher. The shadows grew longer. And the click-clack of the wheels became a song of sleep I couldn't resist. I joined the rest.

I WOKE to the sound of screaming voices, the shouts of men, the flickering lights of torches blazing. I wasn't conscious of my hand moving, yet my gun was in my palm. Joyous laughter greeted me. I turned bewildered eyes on Jessie who, seeing the look, rocked back and forth in her seat in paroxysms of wild joy.

"Don't look so savage," she said when she was able to control herself. "There isn't anything to be alarmed over. We've arrived in the midst of a *fiesta*. And we might as well go see what's happening, because I don't think we'll go any further for a while. Not if I know my Brazilian trains. The crew is probably celebrating with the villagers, by now."

Ribins, as usual, looked both bored and disgusted with the turn of events. Jessie turned her face to him and asked:

"Mind if we go, John?"

For once his consent was ungrudging. Of course Smitty had to tag along.

It was more than just a village. And from one end to the other it was a gigantic torchlight parade. The three of us got out on the platform and joined the throng. The train shed was in the heart of the town and it wasn't more than a stone's throw and we were in the middle of a procession of merry-makers.

Jessie explained as we moved along with the throng that they were celebrating a Saint's day. But they really didn't need an excuse to celebrate. Most of their celebrations were impromptu.

We found ourselves in the plaza, the center of the town, and the focal point of the festivities. Here a band was playing, people were dancing, confetti was being tossed about, and joy reigned supreme.

I held tightly to Jessie's arm. The crowd was so thick, they shoved so

hard, although good-naturedly, I was afraid we'd become separated. Someone thrust a bottle of rum into my fist and I drained half of the oddly fiery drink. A man ran up to us and threw his arms around Jessie and kissed her cheek with a loud, smacking noise. A young girl whose face was delirious with joy leaped on Smitty, and while he tried to stop her, pinioned his arms and kissed him full on the lips.

This joy-unrestrained was all right, but it was getting a little out of hand. I decided that perhaps we should be getting back to the train. Jessie was disappointed at my suggestion, but didn't demure as I started back.

I cursed under my breath when I saw our way back was blocked by the crowd. We'd have to use the side streets. I'd noticed when we came to the plaza that the streets radiated from it like the spokes of a wheel, and that intersecting streets crossed at regular intervals. Any street back would bring us to an intersection which would set us straight.

Like the streets of all Latin-American towns, this one was dark, crooked and odorous, with here and there a faint light breaking through the darkness. The three of us walked carefully along the cobbled street. Jessie was in a giggling mood, her thoughts on some of the characters we'd seen.

"How silly you looked," she said, "when that girl kissed Smitty."

I pulled her away from a foul-smelling puddle in the middle of the street and she leaned heavily against me. A breath of subtle perfume came to my nostrils, her body was firm to my own and her lips were inches away. My arm tightened around her and I drew her close, pressed my lips to hers.

HER lips were hard, resentful, but as I pressed harder, they relaxed,

softened and opened slightly. A warmth I hadn't experienced in a long time, flooded my being. The kiss seemed to last for an eternity. Then she went limp and I released her.

"That was for my dignity," I said softly.

"I can't say it did much for mine," she said, smiling.

We'd stopped after the kiss and just stood there looking at each other, smiling for a few seconds and not saying anything else.. It was Smitty who brought us back to reality. He had meandered ahead a few yards. Now he came back at a trot. There was a moon and I saw the fear on his face. Then I saw why.

We'd come to a dead end. A low, white wall marked the end of the street. And as though they had detached themselves from the wall itself, a half dozen shadows moved toward us. I turned a glance over my shoulder and saw others coming at us from behind. We had walked into an ambush of some sort. Evidently not all the natives were at the fiesta.

Jessie flattened herself close to me. Her breath came more quickly but other than that there was nothing to show that she was afraid.

"Here, Smitty!" I called him. "Close up to me. And don't start anything until I give you the nod."

There was no time for more. The ones behind us were only a few feet off.

I whipped around and pulled my gun at the same time.

"Stand still," I said.

They kept coming.

"They don't understand," Jessie said.

"They'll understand this," I said, and whipped a single shot above their heads.

It stopped them but only for a second. Then they came forward again,

but slower this time.

"They're still coming, Bull," Smitty whispered hoarsely. "What'll I do?"

"Wait till they come in close," I said.

They came within ten feet of us on either side and stopped. Somebody in the larger group called something to the other side. Another answered. Then a third voice shouted a command, and there was no longer any hesitation. They rushed us from both sides. Smitty backed up until he was stopped by Jessie. And with her in the middle, protected by our bodies, we waited.

"Okay, Smitty," I said.

Our guns roared, and this time there wasn't the business of firing over their heads. This time we shot to kill. Two men fell, and two more and again our guns roared, and again a couple fell.

They broke and ran.

The shots brought lights in the houses to either side. Windows were raised, heads were gingerly poked out, voices raised in querulous questions. But I had a single thought. Get out, fast.

Jessie's teeth were chattering as with cold. I didn't know whether our friends had left for good or not. And if they had only retired to a better ambush, they'd make sure that the next meeting wasn't going to end in the same way. Grabbing Jessie's hand I backed away, telling Smitty to, "Watch behind us."

The flickering lights of the torches now seemed miles away. Somewhere between us and those torches were men who were thirsting for our blood. We came to next intersection and I flattened against the wall. Behind us, the calls for police rang out. We had more than one worry. If the police got to us, there was going to be lots of explaining to do. But that fact didn't bother me as much as where our friends

had disappeared to. They weren't going to arrest us. Not they. Better the police, I thought.

Sticking my head out, cautiously, I looked to both sides of the street. Nothing. I turned my head close to Jessie's and whispered, "Stay close to the buildings."

She nodded in understanding, and we started off.

We were about half-way down the street when they caught us. And from a direction I was least expecting them to use, above. The first thing I knew several of them had dropped around us. Before we could use our guns they were on us. A sliver of steel creased my shoulder, as one of them came at me from the side. At the same time another leaped at me from the front. I drew back my arm to club with the pistol and a third caught my arm. I could hear Smitty fighting, heard the smack of his gun on someone's skull, and heard someone groan. Then the lights went out for me.

THERE were the sounds of voices.

I shook the stardust from my brain, and the cobwebs parted from my eyes. We were on some sort of boat. I could hear the slap of water against the sides of the craft and could feel a slightly rocking motion. The boat smelled of fish, and a more foul odor. Someone beside me groaned with each motion of the boat. It was pitch dark. I couldn't see who it was.

I felt with my hands and my fingers felt the soft outlines of a woman's body. Jessie! I felt a sigh of thanksgiving rise within me as my hand felt her breast rise and fall in slow, steady breathing. Once more there was the groaning murmur, and I identified the sound as coming from somewhere to my right. I crawled over and felt for the person. My hands passed across

a face whose right cheek was wet. A swift examination showed Smitty had been blugged on the face, but of other wounds there was no evidence.

I crawled back to Jessie's side and shook her gently.

She stirred, shrank from my fingers and tried to crawl away.

"Easy, honey," I whispered. "It's me."

She came back and for a few seconds snuggled close to me. I caressed her until her body stopped its quivering. She whispered:

"Thank God! I was so frightened. They kicked you when you were down. I thought they killed you. And Smitty. They beat him with clubs, even after he was unconscious."

"I think he's okay," I said. "The old coot takes a lot of pounding. Any idea where we are or where we're going? Did they talk after they got us on board?"

"No," she whispered. "I was too frightened to pay any attention. They threw me down here but nobody bothered me, though they threatened me. Then they carried you both aboard and dumped you alongside. I could feel and hear you breathing, darling, so I waited for consciousness to return. Smitty was bleeding badly on his face. But he too was alive. It was all I could think of. That you were alive . . ."

I brought her close and held her tightly in an embrace for a few seconds while a single word, 'Darling,' echoed, and reechoed in my brain.

A louder groan came from Smitty and then a muttered imprecation. I left Jessie's side and crawled to him.

"How's it, fella?" I asked, my ear close to his mouth.

"Ow, my head. They musta kicked me, Bull. My head hurts like I'd been buttin' the side of a barn."

"Sure. But we're okay. Alive anyway. Move around a little. See if you're hurt inside."

I felt him stir to the accompaniment of groans and after a while he said:

"Nope. Guess they don't know where to kick."

"Good. They've got our guns so we'll have to be careful how we make our next move. But Bull Gowan isn't sticking long in this hell-hole. Jessie's over there with me. Come along."

My eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and I could make out what sort of place they'd put us in. It was some sort of storeroom. There were sacks of something lying in a corner, and coils of rope piled up in another. The deck roof was about five feet from the floor. Below I heard a sound which could have been that of propellor blades, though the grumbling of an ancient engine came from fore. One thing I knew. It wasn't a large boat.

A SCURRYING sound came from the *v* of the stern and Jessie's eyes flashed in that direction. A muffled scream came from her throat. A rat had scrambled away from one of the sacks.

I was thinking as fast as my brain would operate. But nothing came to my mind. We were helpless without guns. Unless we could take those on deck by surprise. Alone or with Smitty, I would have attempted it, but not with Jessie along. Our eyes went to the companionway, as it suddenly opened and the glare of a lantern made us blink in its light. I saw a barely definable shape behind it.

A guttural voice shouted something to us. Only Jessie understood. She answered and heard the reply in silence.

"What does he want?" I asked.

"Nothing. He's only telling us that if we behave nothing will happen to us. But that if we try to make trouble, trouble's what we'll get."

"Nice chap," I said. "Well tell him that we won't make trouble unless . . ."

I saw him better now. He didn't impress me but the rifle cradled in his arm did. He gave us a suspicious look and threw words at Jessie again. Wearily, she answered. He shook his head in obvious satisfaction, turned and left, taking the lantern with him.

Once more the darkness and gloom of our moods descended. Smitty, ever the philosopher, leaned against the ribbed side and waited for my words of wisdom. I had none in me. We were stymied for the while. And there wasn't much use in idle speculation.

"Y'know," Jessie said after a while. "I saw something that was interesting while we were being taken aboard."

We waited for her revelation.

"Well, for one thing, I'd say we were about halfway to our destination. We're on a river of course. But the prow of the boat was pointed *downstream*."

"And what does that mean?" I asked.

"That we're going back the way we came," she said. "Unless . . ."

"Unless," I prompted.

"We're being taken inland. If we are, and I think we are, that's not so good."

"Why?"

"There is nothing chartered inland. So if we did manage to escape we'd be lost in the jungle."

"But what are these men doing there?" I asked. "They've kidnapped us for some reason. Whatever the reason it has to do with these people your father warned us against, his enemies. But, as I remember, he said their hold-

ings adjoined his. Of course they could have a camp elsewhere. Still if I were doing this job, I'd want us where I could keep an eye on us."

She shrugged her shoulders to my reasoning. I grinned at her and leaned back and flung my arm over my head. It smashed against something hard, like a large spike. Even as I yelped in sudden pain, I scrambled to my knees and felt for the object. It felt good in my hand. A marlinspike can be a very deadly weapon in a desperate man's hand.

We crawled around after my discovery, searching for others. We found another. That meant the girl would be unarmed. But it was enough. Now how to get the guy with the gun to come to the door?

"I know this is going to sound foolish. But I think it'll work." I made a suggestion. "One of us, you, Smitty, will play sick. After all, they did kick you hard enough to kill you. I'll call for help. The guy will come to the door . . ."

"No," Jessie vetoed the idea. "We can't take a chance. After all, he might be brighter than we suppose. And the whole idea is so obvious. I've a better version. I'll call for help. You will kneel by Smitty's side. And when our friend comes to the door, he'll see me there. With you two all the way over here, he won't think twice about coming closer, since he'll have the rifle. Then . . ." she made a motion as though she were striking.

"Ugh, ugh," I said. "That's our job."

BUT for once Smitty voted against me.

"The dame's right. It's a cinch to work the way she's figured it. Go on, Bull."

Smitty was right, too. The way she'd planned it, it would work, if any-

thing worked. Of course, if he were suspicious from the start . . . I agreed.

Her screams were real enough to wake the dead. Smitty began to moan and I knelt at his side. I made sure the hand holding the spike was out of sight.

She was pounding at the door. We heard the hoarse sound of the guard's voice. Jessie backed away slightly and stood to one side as the companionway was flung open and the figure of the guard was framed on the threshold again. He just stood there, his mean eyes surveying us. Jessie had one hand to her mouth as though stifling a scream. She pointed to us and said something in rapid-fire Portuguese to the guard. He looked at her quickly and looked away toward us. Slowly, the rifle held at the ready, he began a stealthy march toward us.

The sound of the spike on the back of his head was the sweetest sound I'd ever heard. He fell flat on his face, but even before he landed I caught the lantern. Without it we were in the dark, and in more ways than one.

Smitty was already scrambling for rope. He looked like a snake wrapped in a cocoon when we finished tying him.

Jessie stood guard at the door. I let her keep the spike. Smitty had the rifle and I had the other spike and a knife I'd found in his belt. I slipped the spike into the waistband of my trousers and stepped forward the knife held low down and ready for instant use.

"Smitty and I'll go first, honey," I whispered to her. "Stay close behind, but if anything happens try to stay out of our way. And if there's any shooting, hit the deck and lay there until it's over."

The edge of a moon hung over the

rim of the jungle. Our side of the deck was wrapped in gloom. One by one we hit the deck and found cover. I saw there was no need for the lantern's light now so I doused it. Besides, it might give us away. We seemed to be drifting. At least there was no sound of engine's turning.

We huddled against a rail and debated our next move.

"There's one guy at the wheel," Smitty said. "I can pick him off from here."

"Not yet," I said. "We've got to see how many more there are." I waited for a few seconds, thinking that perhaps there would be others on deck. But only the helmsman's head showed.

"They're probably below," Jessie said. "If we could get to the one up there . . . but first we'd have to make sure that the ones below stayed there."

"That's my job," I said. "Smitty, you stay here with Jessie. Keep your eye on the guy up there. I'm going to sneak up on him and try to knock him off, or better make him see things our way. Watch for my signal. But if the guys below come up, don't wait. Let 'em have it."

Before Jessie could protest, I was crawling forward.

THE odors of the jungle came over the gunwales, rank odors, foul with a peculiar rottenness. And mixed with the stink came the jungle dampness, warm, yet oddly chilling. In a matter of seconds I was soaked in my own sweat. The boat seemed to be drifting, with only the wheelsman's hands keeping it on its course.

I'd removed my shoes to make sure I wouldn't make any scratchy sounds on the deck as I crawled along. Slowly I became aware of the dimensions of the boat. It was typical of the river steamers plying the tributaries of the

Amazon. Small-beamed, it was of shallow draught. There were many hidden bars along the river banks, and a boat had to be of shallow draught to ride it high enough to escape the traps of jungle trees, laying their lengths along the water's edge.

I was amidships when I became aware of a strange glare in the near distance. Lifting myself until I could see above the rail's edge I made out the flickering flame of a campfire half hidden among the trees. The man at the wheel must have seen it at the same time because he stiffened and bent lower over the wheel.

The thought flashed through my mind that this was their rendezvous. I had little time if that was the case. He would call the rest in a moment. I stood erect and leaped forward.

He never knew what hit him. I think the spike went all the way down to his shoulders, I hit him so hard. He sank against the wheel sending the wheel spinning. I shoved him off and stopped the spinning wheel. But someone below must have felt it. I heard the creaking of a door and light streamed over me. A head came up out of the companionway to my rear. A voice bellowed something at me.

I knew that I was caught unless I answered. There is one sound which is universal in all tongues and languages, and it means disgust.

"Aah," I wrenched the sound from me in deep desperation.

There was a grumble of sound from the other, a second's pause and the clatter of his descending feet. There was only darkness again and the chatter of my heart against my ribs. I stuck an arm aloft and waved Smitty and Jessie forward.

"Now what?" I asked. "This current is drifting us around the bend. And if you'll look ahead you'll see the camp-

fire of our friends. I don't know anything about boats. Do we just drift?"

"One of those below must be able to steer," Jessie said.

"Sure. But what do we do, knock on the door and . . . But of course. I'll knock, and the first one up gets the end of the rifle in his ribs. It's our only out. Let's go, Smitty. Jess, just hold the wheel steady. Be back soon, I hope."

I banged on the door. There was no sound from below. I banged again and this time there was a response. The door opened to a wide crack, a head stuck out of the opening, and my fingers went around a hairy neck and pulled upward. There was the sound of a choked snarl and the rest of the man came up. He stopped fighting when Smitty stuck the barrel's end into his ribs.

I shoved him forward, the knife stuck in the side of his throat. Smitty banged the door closed and mounted guard at the opening. Our friend could only gurgle in terror as the knife pressed hard against the flesh.

"Tell this lug to put us about," I told Jessie.

She spouted words at him and he answered in a cringing tone. She stepped away from the wheel and he took her place. I turned as I caught the edge of a streak of light. The companionway had been opened. But at sight of Smitty with the rifle whoever had opened it, closed it quicker.

Suddenly I felt the boat quiver as it turned against the current. It was swifter than I imagined for we were swept downstream for a few yards before he could swing us broadside to the river. I turned a quick look in his direction and saw he was fighting the wheel. Slowly, the boat began to respond to the wheel's urging. We had almost made it when there was a shock

and jolt and grinding noise.

"WE'VE struck something," Jessie cried in alarm.

The first blow had been light. The next almost set us on end. Jessie was thrown against me so hard I almost went down. Shouts of terror came from below. Smitty staggered, recovered his balance and scrambled against the suddenly turned-up deck, to my side.

There was a louder grinding sound, a ripping of timbers from below and louder shouts from those trapped below deck. There was no time to lose. Gripping Jessie around the waist, I stepped to the rail and leaped into the river. There was a second splash in an instant, and I heard Smitty's voice urging me to hit for the shore. It turned out that Jessie was a better swimmer than I. We made the weed-filled shore together. I pulled Smitty erect and took a last look at the boat. It simply turned over lazily and sank. But before it did, I saw several shapes outlined against the rail, leap for the water.

It was the frying pan after the fire. And the pan was too damned hot. We no sooner scrambled up the bank of the river and we were lost. The jungle enfolded us with clammy hands; darkness that was blacker than night became a warm blanket under which we huddled in fear. Jessie crept to my side as we crouched under the shelter of the underbrush at the edge of the river. The jungle night gave the muted sounds of its life and the noises sent tremors of fear through our souls.

"We can't just stay here," Jessie said. Her voice sounded a note of bravery.

"Yeah? But where'll we go?" Smitty asked.

That was *my* question. I'd seen too many jungles not to know that you just can't go barging into them and expect

to find paved streets, or even blazed trails. And this was the Brazilian jungle, unmapped and uncharted. Lost would be a mild word for what we'd be if we ventured far. There was but a single course for us.

I took it.

"Sorry, gang. We can't go on blindly. We're just surmising that the campfire is that of our friends who were waiting for the boat. It may be that of friendly natives. . . ."

Smitty grunted something derogatory, but Jessie's hand tightened on my arm.

"You're right," she said. "We'll have to take a chance."

It didn't seem a long way off. Yet we took what seemed to be hours in crossing the stretch of wild growth before we came within the radius of the glowing blaze. I was panting in gasping breaths, my feet ached, their bare soles seemed to have been dragged in flame, and I was soaked in perspiration. Smitty was as badly off. Jessie must have been made of iron the way she stood up under the damp heat and tortuous twisting trail we followed.

There were five men grouped around the fire. They were hunched around the fire as if for warmth. The flickering flames made it difficult identifying them. But when they heard the crashing sounds of our approach they arose in concerted motion and gazed with intent in our direction. Three of them carried rifles.

One of them called something in Spanish. I answered him, though I hadn't made out the words. Once again he shouted something. This time I understood. It was a command to identify ourselves. I was too tired to bother. I simply nodded my head for Smitty and Jessie to follow. We stumbled wearily into the light of the fire.

"Hola!" one of them, a bearded giant

exclaimed. "Tis a woman. The devil kiss me."

They came forward and looked curiously at us. Jessie looked blankly at them, and found that her endurance was at an end. I caught her before she fell.

"Got some food or something to drink?" I said.

There was concern in his voice, as the giant asked:

"She is ill? What is wrong?"

"Later," I said. "First water."

HE BELLOWED commands at the others and they scattered, to return bearing gourds of water and more substantial nourishment.

We squatted around the fire after we'd eaten and talked. I told the big guy what had happened to us. He seemed to be the leader of the lot. He shook his head often and made clucking sounds with his tongue as our adventures unfolded. The others sat and just listened open-mouthed, like children hearing a fairy tale for the first time.

"Hola!" it was his favorite expression. "Incredible! These dastards, these, forgive me madam, these imbeciles. To treat a woman that way. But that is the way of some. I do not believe in it.

"I am an outlaw. But an outlaw against the state. It is my privilege. I don't believe in the way of government we have. Again a privilege. So I am one against the world." His broad shoulders rose in a shrug, and his beard moved as his lips made a gesture of disdain. "You say you left Sao Paulo? It will be a simple matter to return. We are only forty miles downstream from the city. Of course the police do not know that. Oh, no. But we have a few boats which we use . . . I will send two men with you. It will be

nothing."

I liked the big guy. He talked a lot, but at least he said something. I got to wishing I could take him with us. If only I knew just how far we were going.

"By the way, 'Jessie,' I said, speaking in Spanish for his benefit, "how far from this place we're going to, are we?"

"About four hundred miles."

I turned to him.

"You say you're against the state, or at least what the state stands for?"

He nodded emphatically.

"Why not come with us, then?" I said. "We can use men like you. I will not speak of pay, but it will not be small. Enough to make the venture worth your while."

Once more the thick, black beard moved. His glance was lowered and I couldn't see how I was making out. I kept talking:

"It is plain that whoever these men are, they will not stop in their efforts until they have accomplished what they are after . . . Or we stop them. But there are only two of us. And strange to the land. You have four men. . . ."

"Nineteen," he said in sober tones. "Not many but all of courage."

" . . . Nineteen!" I exclaimed. "An army. We can conquer all of South America with nineteen men."

He looked up then and the firelight shot gleams of flame from his eyes.

"I have said that also," he said. "This place we go to, who owns it? What is it?"

"My father, Pedro Hernandes Juan de Lopez Gonsales," Jessie said proudly, "is the owner of this mine. And he is operating it for the great good of Brazil."

"Gonsales! Your father? A worthy man . . . A great man. Pity there are not more like him. I talk too much.

I knew your father in the old days. Ask no more. I am yours. Lead me on."

My feet squeaked, I sighed so loud. This was more than luck. It was the best of fortune. This character would die for us, now. It was in his pose, in his words. As he would say, hola!

"Swell," I said in English. I switched back to Spanish; "All to the good. Are they where you can get to them quickly?"

"Within the hour," blackbeard said. "Pinto!"

THE smallest of those ragged men leaped to his feet at the shout and came to his side. He was even smaller than Smitty. An enormous machete hung from the frayed rope which served as belt.

He rubbed child-like hands as blackbeard gave instructions:

"Go. Find Vasco and the others. Bring them here, and do not wait for the sun's rising to do so."

The tiny form vanished into the forest, like a shadow fleeing a cloud.

"Rest," the big guy said. "It will be a few hours before his return."

I watched Smitty curl up like a cat, next to the fire. Jessie snuggled close to me, looked into my eyes and smiled shyly as my hand caressed her face, and in the next instant went into a deep sleep. I looked up and found blackbeard's eyes on mine. It was hard to say, but I thought the fierce eyes held a gleam of gentleness. Then sleep gathered around me and captured me.

A heavy hand shook my shoulder. I struggled up from the depths of a tiredness I hadn't thought possible. The fire was now a small island of reddish coals. I blinked my eyes awake and looked about. Pinto had found his companions.

Gently I awakened Jessie. She gave

a small cry of fear, which changed to one of gladness when she saw me. Smitty was sitting up, one hand still clutching the rifle, the other rubbing at his eyes. I stood and helped Jessie to her feet. Blackbeard was waiting for us.

"How do we go, by river?" I asked.

"Ho. Four hundred miles. By train, of course."

I thought he'd gone crazy. Train! We were in the heart of the jungle, and he mentioned trains as though they were a few yards away.

"There is a small town about eight miles on the river," he explained. "The train crew were in the fiesta, last night. It could not have left until this morning. We will meet the train at Coronado. Si?"

"Si."

SOMETHING kept beating at the back of my mind as we trudged through the early morning mist that rose through the jungle fastness. What had happened to those men who had managed to leap to safety from the boat? Blackbeard, whose name was Diego, had the answer.

"I told Pinto to tell the others to keep a lookout for them, and to make sure that none escaped."

I shrugged my shoulders at the words. It was the law of the jungle, I supposed. Eat or be eaten. Diego the outlaw, could not take chances. Jessie could not help but shudder at the cold-bloodedness of the whole thing. Yet she too saw the necessity of Diego's act.

Diego's boats proved to be a half dozen large canoes, hollowed from the trunks of trees. They were large enough to accommodate eight of us. I looked around for the oars. There were none. Diego saw my searching glance and smiled in secret enjoyment. Smitty, sitting behind me, nudged me and said:

"Can you beat that! We ride in class. Look!"

From a hiding place in the brush, some of the men were hauling tarpaulin-covered motors. Diego was a *modern* outlaw. No wonder he had laughed when I wondered how we were going to manage to make four hundred miles by boat. But we were going to meet the train at Coronado. I wondered how far Coronado was. It proved to be twenty miles.

When we got to where Diego thought it was safe to land, he instructed six of his men to take the boats back to their hiding place and meet us at our final destination. Then we started to town. Coronado was not as large a place as was the last town. In fact it was little more than a village. Our entry only made news to the goats and dogs asleep in the plaza. The few women who were about, bent on their morning's shopping in the market gave us sleepy-eyed glances as we walked down the cobbled, crooked streets. But if our arms carried openly made any impression, I did not see it.

There was but a single person at the ramshackle station. He squatted on the ground, a blanket thrown over his shoulders, his head buried under a huge sombrero, and his chin resting on his knees. Diego prodded him with a foot.

The man didn't look up but sodden words came from under the huge hat. Diego growled a question at him. The man answered and Diego turned to us and said, "It has not arrived yet. Good! It gives me time to make plans."

We went into a huddle with his men and Smitty, I and Jessie leaned against the wooden building where the shade sheltered us against the already powerful rays of the rising sun.

"Do you think we can trust this man?" Jessie asked.

"More than we can trust some I

know," I said pointedly.

"And he ain't just beating his gums, Miss," Smitty said.

She gave me a sharp look.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Hasn't it occurred to you that your father's friend, Ribins, is always in these deals where we meet trouble?"

"No it hasn't. And I don't see why you say that. What had he to do with what happened in Sao? Or last night? He was on the train, wasn't he?"

"Sure. He was always out of harm's way. He somehow always managed to be in a place where no one could point the old finger at him. That's what makes me suspicious. Why didn't he come with us?"

"Why should he? You acted as if you were going to commit murder if he dared to intrude," she said.

That got me. She was acting as if she had wanted him to be along. But because she was too polite or something, she hadn't said anything. Well, if that was the way she felt, the hell with her! Yet, even as I turned and walked angrily from her, I knew she had reason for her actions. And that mine still stemmed from suspicion which I couldn't prove.

Only Diego, Pinto and Smitty were in sight. I looked for the rest but they had disappeared. Diego was looking up the track. I hadn't heard anything. Only the muted jungle sounds rose to disturb the air. Yet he had evidently some sense which told him of the approaching train. For it wasn't more than a minute and it came into view.

It puffed to a groaning, muttering stop before us.

Little Pinto stepped aboard with us, his blanket wrapped around him like an Indian squaw's. While we looked about for a compartment which was empty, he stationed himself in the vestibule. Diego was somewhere ahead.

Where the rest were I didn't know. Perhaps they weren't going to take the train after all? We found a first-class compartment midway in the train, which was occupied by a sleeping gentleman in a snow-white seersucker suit. He snored loudly past a huge curling moustache. He had three gold teeth which gleamed brightly in the sun, slanting through the window.

EVEN as we made ourselves comfortable I felt a repressed air of excitement in the car. Suddenly the conductor trotted past. I caught a glimpse of a fear-stricken face. Then directly behind him, came Pinto, no longer wrapped in the blanket, a rifle held in the small brown hand. There was the sound of released steam, and the train started with a jerk which rattled our teeth. Now I knew where the rest of the men had gone, to hide in the underbrush which lined the tracks. Our friend, Diego, had taken over the transportation system.

It wasn't long before he appeared.

He grinned in deep self-satisfaction as he shouldered his way through the door. His hand came down on the immaculate shoulders of our sleeping companion's white suit, and shook him awake. Sounds of distress came from the man's throat. Diego, ever polite, begged the man to leave us in peace. The poor little guy almost broke his neck, scrambling through the door.

"It is done," Diego said. "My men are in the locomotive compartment. The train will now proceed at full speed for our destination, with God's blessing. Do not worry, friends. Diego will see us through in safety."

I couldn't help but admire the assurance of the big guy. No questions about the odds against us. No questions of any kind. Just let's get cutting, time's wasting.

Smitty found vocal expression for his admiration:

"Say guy. You're a pretty right character, y'know?"

Diego turned a puzzled face to me. I explained what Smitty said. A broad smiled parted the beard.

"You are my friends, no?" he said. "For my friends, my life."

It was just that simple. I couldn't understand why he thought us such friends, because we hadn't done anything to warrant the belief. But I understood a little about guys like this. I'd met them before. It was that they saw something in you that made them act like that. And they were sincere in their words.

I caught sight of Pinto standing guard outside the door.

"Si," Diego said. "I take no chances. Six men went with the boats. I have twelve men here, two to a car including the locomotive. One must always be on guard against one's enemies. Besides, the sight of the guns my men carry has a moral effect on the passengers. They know they are well-protected against bandits."

I swallowed a grin. Diego told us his reason with such an expression of seriousness I almost thought he was sincere. But he too could not contain his delight at his own cleverness, that it leaked out in the grin. Jessie had to spoil it for me by thinking of Ribins.

"I'd better go along," I said to Diego. "Besides, I want to talk to the man."

Jessie looked at me with alarm in her eyes.

"Don't worry," I said bitterly. "I won't do anything to the guy. I just want to ask him some questions."

"I can see that you are," she said. "Is that why your fists are clenched?"

She had to have the last words. And, as usual, she was right. Diego walked ahead of me. As we reached the small

vestibule which led to another car, he turned and stopped abruptly, his broad shoulders filling the aisle almost from wall to wall.

"The young lady irks you, my friend?" he asked.

"A mild word, irks," I said.

"I have made it a lifetime practice never to talk too much with women. They have a better knowledge of words than I. A man is meant for action. And the ear can never take the place of the hand."

I UNDERSTOOD what he meant.

Or did I? What the hell did he want me to do, beat her? H'm. Maybe he had something there? I shoved him along, and he turned, laughing loudly as he did so. I promised myself that I'd make him eat that laugh someday.

We started with the first compartment and went down the line. Invariably, there was a frightened face at the window, staring into the aisle. And at our appearance they would crouch in the farthest corner of the compartment, thinking, no doubt, that we were intent on murder. He was in the last of the first-class compartments, in one which he reigned king, for he was alone. He looked up with an expression which was half-amazement, half-horror.

"Surprised," I said. "I suppose you are. So am I. I didn't think you'd be here. I thought that, having discovered our absence, you'd be waiting for us back there in the fiesta. Or were you sure we wouldn't be here?"

He licked his lips, swallowed and looked at the huge Diego.

"N-no," he managed to get out. "I . . . I waited and when you . . ."

"When we didn't show up you shrugged those broad shoulders of yours, said it was a good job, and went light-heartedly on your way."

"Don't put words in my mouth," he

said sharply. He had guts. But I wanted facts. Maybe he needed a beating, I thought? After all, we weren't playing games.

"I didn't know where you went. I know Jessie! If she got interested in something she might take all night in it. I've had the experience with her. So I thought, when you didn't show up, that was the case. I knew there would be another train through in two days. I would wait for you at Santasima."

"Santasima?" Diego said. "I thought you said Coronado?"

"What does he know about this?" Ribins asked. "Where did you find him?"

I wasn't going to go into the details of our discovery at this time. So I said:

"I thought we could use him, so I hired him and his men to work for us. Any objections?"

"No. You have authority to hire anyone you want. I was just curious, that's all."

"That's okay then," I said. "Well, I didn't think I'd get anything out of you. So let's go back to where we are. Jessie's worried about you."

I hated the smirk on his face when I said that.

When Jessie saw him she acted as if *he* had been the one to go through what we had been. She fussed over him like he hadn't eaten his baby food for days, the jerk. Diego's belly shook in silent laughter, and Smitty looked in open-mouthed surprise at the two of them. I couldn't take it. I jerked my head for Diego to come with me, and excused myself. Smitty started to follow but I gave him the sign to stay.

"My friend," Diego tried to throw oil on the troubled waters, "I don't think you are of the puppy-love stage. You are too old for that."

I looked out of the narrow window in the small vestibule. I had an idea

what he was going to say.

"Therefore yours is an honest emotion. I do not know the lady very well but I know her father and have heard of her mother. She can only show their traits, unless she is an idiot. We know she is not. Let us not play games, please. She loves you or she doesn't. If she does, well and good. There is an antidote for her actions. It might be a talking to, or it might be a beating, I am not prescribing. But first of all, find out where you stand in this. It will save many heart aches. And in the game we are playing, heart aches have no place."

So Diego was a philosopher. Well, that was all right except I was a little too old for that sort of advice. And, although Jessie was in many of my thoughts, she wasn't in all of them. Diego had mentioned he knew her father. He had mentioned it before, also. I wanted to know a little about him.

"He is a strange man," Diego said. "I knew him from the old days when we were both revolutionaries. The regime we were backing came into power and Gonsales received his due for the support he gave. I will not say that the same thing was not offered me, but I found the life I had led too adventurous to give up."

"TIME passed and with coming elections our friends lost their power. By that time Gonsales was a rich man and powerful man. You remember how the girl gave him his full title? He came by it rightly, his father's father was an early settler, and his father had been one of those who had been granted twenty thousand acres of forest-land, which later was a rubber empire. But that land lost its value and Gonsales had to start afresh. His friends were in power and it was an easy matter.

"Y'know," the liquid Spanish became

poetic, "the coffee berries grow cherry-red against the lush green hills. But all the coffee in the world will not make a single loaf of bread. And in the last few years people have been hungry in Brazil. It is not right. We are a great land and there are forty million of us. Hunger should not be part of our patrimony. I think it was that which brought Gonsales out of the doldrums of his rich life. Once more he is crusading, and again for a righteous cause.

"Not like myself. I tell you now, I am no great one. I am an outlaw because I robbed a train of its gold, so there is a price on my head. And my companions are poor paisanos. But I know what is right. And so I join Gonsales. I think I know what is in that hill he owns out there in Santasima. When you said Coronado I thought it was something else. Now it can mean only one thing.

"Being an outlaw makes one privy to all the little gossip of the natives, of all the people of the backwoods. There is tungsten in that hill he owns."

The secret was out now. So it *was* tungsten.

I shook my head in understanding and said:

"Tungsten, eh? No wonder there are people who want in. They say that the man or men who control the tungsten output control the world. There isn't such a hell of a lot of it around anyway. If this mine can produce the ductile product . . ."

"Ductile? What is the meaning of the word?" Diego asked.

I explained and got a look of wonder.

"How do you know so much of this?" he asked.

"What's the difference? I know, that's all. But you've cleared up the part that was bothering me."

I watched the panorama of jungle pass for several minutes. And Diego

watched me. A town flowed by and we caught a glimpse of people standing on a platform. Then they passed from view and the jungle reached out and engulfed us again.

"Nonstop, eh?" I said.

Diego nodded. "Can't take any chances. I don't think that there will be any trouble at the next station, but when we pass that one also they will wire ahead."

"So what do you plan doing?"

"We go a hundred and eighty miles before we strike another station. After that there is one more and the end of the line. It is the stop before the end of the line which worries me. You see, it is a switch point. And if there is anyplace they can stop us it is at that point."

Once more the specter of questioning police agents raised its head. I was more afraid of that than of any actual danger we would encounter. We *had* to get past the last obstacle.

"DIEGO," Pinto said, "the passengers are getting restless."

"Go and entertain them, then," Diego said.

The little outlaw raised querulous eyebrows. We had been traveling far into the night. The stop Diego had mentioned, passed in a small blaze of dimly lighted huts and streets. I caught a glimpse of the station master running out of his small stand. For an instant his face showed in startling revelation all the horror and fright he felt at the strange occurrence. Then we were barreling into the night again.

"It is easy to say that, Diego. But it is not entertainment they want. It is food."

"Food? Why? Are they hungry?"

"It is hard to say, but I think some of them are looking at me as if I'd make a nice stew."

"Then tell them to go to the dining car," Diego said explosively.

"What dining car?"

We all looked at each other. It was strange but I hadn't felt any need for food until that instant. Now, of a sudden, I was ravenous. The same odd transition took place in all of us. Perhaps we'd been so keyed up, food had been pushed into the background. I licked my lips and discovered that they were dry, and that my tongue wasn't quite as flexible as it usually was. It seemed more brittle now, less moist than usual.

"I think I know the answer," Jessie said. "We always stop for lunch and dinner . . . Now . . ."

Diego was a man of action. These petty things bothered him. What had to do with food? I almost saw the thought pass through his mind. And with the thought, a peevish look. Ah! Hunger had hit him in the guts too. An explosive Spanish oath broke from his lips.

"There is no dining car?" he belated. "What sort of idiot train is this without a dining car? Come, my friend. Let us look to this."

I was willing. Besides, Jessie had given me the kind of appealing look which I couldn't deny. She was *hungry*, the look said. Well, good for her! So were we all.

Our car carried only first-class passage, as did the next. But from then on to the engine there were only second-class coaches. And of dining accommodations, there were none. It was odd, I thought, that all the people in the first-class cars looked hungry, yet those in the others didn't. The explanation, it developed, was simple. The people in the cheaper cars carried their own food.

Diego watched with hungry eyes, a woman feed an immense piece of sau-

sage to her youngster. He ate it to the last piece of casing, while our mouths watered until the saliva dribbled down the corners of our mouths. They returned our stares with the blank, incomprehending stares the natives always have until I couldn't take it any more.

"Let's get out of here," I said savagely, "before I take that sausage from the kid's hands and eat it to the last piece of garlic."

Diego could only shrug helpless shoulders when I asked him what to do.

"Well, how far then, to the next stop?"

"Let us ask the engineer that question," he said.

The engineer proved to be the last straw. He and the fireman were quite comfortable with sandwiches in their paws. The two guards were asleep in a corner. Diego booted them awake.

"Pigs!" he screamed. "Is this how you watch them? Is this how you follow my orders?"

"But," said one of them, "where can they go? Besides, look. They are happy."

Diego turned from them. "How far to the next town?" he asked the engineer.

"To the next town or the next stop?"

"Town."

"One hundred and eighty miles."

"And the next stop?"

"In another three minutes we will be there," the engineer said after consulting an immense watch which hung from an elaborate chain.

"Then we'll stop there," Diego announced.

The engineer tooted his whistle, shrugged his shoulders and accepted the fact with a fine casual manner. It made no difference to him what his orders were. I got the idea he liked this business of barreling through. It broke

the monotony for him.

It was certainly the smallest town we'd hit, so far, nothing but a weather-beaten shack and a dozen disreputable huts. But one of them bore the legend, grocery. It was enough. Diego sent several of his men on a foraging expedition. They came back with enough food to feed us until we arrived at our destination.

"I never thought cheese could taste so good," Jessie said through a mouthful of the stuff.

I agreed wholly with her words.

It was Jessie who got the idea of how to get us out of the jam. There wasn't any way out of our dilemma, it seemed. Sooner or later we were going to meet the immovable force, which would undoubtedly prove to be either the militia or police. I had asked the engineer about that. He had answered the question. Yes, when we passed the last town at which there was telegraphing facilities, there was no doubt of it, a message had gone through to tell of our trains eccentric behavior. There would be someone waiting, all right.

"Why not wire father?" she asked. "He has a lot of friends in the right places. And he could explain we were in a hurry. I'm sure they would forgive his daughter."

And damned if it didn't work.

In fact, the railroad gave us a relief engineer and fireman and high-balled us all the way through to Coronado.

IT WAS the damnedest looking boat I ever saw, with a beam as broad as cop's behind. The river moved in sluggish, mud-colored rhythm. Coronado was not in the low lands. Already we saw the first of the foothills and far on the horizon, were the barely discernable edges of mountains. The river led away toward those distant peaks. The whole lot of us managed to find room

aboard, though the boat wasn't meant for the hauling of more than ten people.

Jessie was treated with the deference given to a goddess.

I found room beside Smitty and Diego, while she continued to enjoy the company of Ribins. I made a silent vow to change that situation as soon as we were in Santasima.

For the first time since we arrived in Brazil, I felt a pleasure at the sight of scenery. For the foothills and low mountains which surrounded Santasima reminded me of an area in Minnesota. It had the same bare, wild-looking monotony of dun-colored dips and rises to its ranges. This was iron ore country. There should be vanadium here also, I thought.

Ribins, Jessie and I rode in an old Buick station wagon. The others had gone off in two trucks, which after the first ten miles were left behind in a cloud of dust. We traveled a hard-packed dirt road, and the driver of the car, a native with all the speed habits of a Chicago driver, drove as though he were on a race track, maneuvering the car around hairpin turns with the aplomb of a man consecrated to scaring his passengers to death.

But I was surprised at the mining community itself. Gonsales had set up a model town, with neat houses, all bearing the inevitable corrugated iron roofs, yet painted to a gleaming whiteness. The community was laid out in blocks which although not many in number, could have housed several hundred workers. There were women in the doorways of several of the houses, and children played in yards, and now and then a dog was to be seen. Our driver shouted the news of our arrival as we sped through the streets.

The company office was on a low hill, which overlooked the town and gave a

superb view of the whole mine. The superintendent was out in person, flaked by his whole staff. I guess the arrival of the big-shot's daughter was a hell of an important event in the community. They bowed low and formally as Jessie stepped from the car. But she wasn't having any. She walked right up to the supe and shook his hand. We were right behind, and as we came up she introduced us, or rather me, he knew Ribins of course.

The guy's name was Posada. I liked him. He was a squat-shaped man, dark-faced, with wild-looking eyes and a determined chin. He spoke very good English.

"I am glad you came," he said.

"Why?" I asked. "Did you know I was coming?"

"Senhor Gonsales said he was going to send someone here," Posada explained. "I didn't know when to expect you, but I knew that you would come someday. And I think you have come at the right time."

"I didn't like the ominous tone he used. We were walking back to the office together, Jessie and Ribins had stayed behind to look at something one of the men had pointed out to them. Posada went on:

"Last night the workmen were going to quit. It took all the power at my command to get them to stay. And it was a good thing Miss Gonsales wired me this morning from Coronado."

That was news. She and Ribins had disappeared for a while. She had sent a wire to Posada. H'm. Maybe she didn't trust me after all?

"She said in the wire," Posada went on, "that her father was sending a man who would fix the situation, and that she had the deepest confidence in him. I read the wire to the workmen. I will say it helped relieve the tenseness of their attitude."

So she *was* on the square. A great deal more than I was, at any rate. I felt a wave of heat come to my face. If Posada saw my flushed face he passed it over. But he was too engrossed in his own troubles to notice mine.

"You see," Posada continued, "we had a visit from the Iribi Indians last night. We barely beat them off . . . Lost eight men to them, matter of fact. Then there were more of those mysterious explosions in two of the main pits. . . ."

He gave me an odd look when he saw my face and stopped talking. Instead, he hurried me to the office. As he showed me to a chair, he whispered:

"I'll tell you later, in confidence. I don't want the girl to know how serious matters are. Or dangerous."

The rest came in as he finished and Posada became the genial host, pouring drinks and making Jessie comfortable. We didn't stay long. He recognized our tiredness and sent several of his men off to scare up some women who would make Jessie's cabin ready. I and Smitty, it appeared, were going to bunk with Posada. I explained Diego to him, while Jessie was kept busy, and got an enthusiastic endorsement of what I did in hiring him. There was the sound of the trucks coming into the office compound, and Posada went out to them. He came back in a few minutes with Smitty in tow. The party broke up then.

Ribins had a place of his own not far from us.

"I DON'T know how much Gonsales told you," Posada said. "Nor am I interested in anything except conditions here. But about the mine, I know all. To start at the beginning, we had eight hundred men a year ago. Now there are four hundred. And if these

attacks continue, in a week there will be only the clerks and foremen.

"It started about six months ago. Strange occurrences at the mine, explosions, accidents, little things which made operations a nightmare. Then, about four months ago, the Indians started their attacks. After all, we are in the beyond, a region which only ten years ago was true wilderness in which white men were afraid to venture."

I interrupted him:

"Yes, I can see that. It reminds me of some of the central China regions I know."

He looked sharply at me. My face gave nothing away. It was just a remark I dropped.

"I couldn't understand why the attacks," Posada went on. "We had always been on good terms with them. And suddenly it was as if we were their worst enemies."

"Look," I said. "Gonsales mentioned something back in Rio, about competitors. Maybe . . . ?"

"It is my thought also. To be truthful, I can say I know it is they who are responsible. But I can prove nothing. And even were I to prove it, what then?"

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"This isn't Rio," he said. "There is no law and order here. The man who is the strongest, wins out, here."

"Then we'll be the strongest. That's why I got Diego. That's why I wanted Smitty. If they want trouble they're going to get it and in such doses, they'll be sorry for a long time afterward. So let's get down to cases. Who and where are these guys from the other outfit?"

"We will go see them tomorrow," Posada said.

That was a ride I'll never forget. Posada, Smitty, Diego and myself started out the first thing in the morn-

ing, just after sun-up when the only ones who were awake were those getting on the morning shift. Jessie's cabin was dark as was Ribins. I made a stipulation that Ribins was not to go with us. Posada was skeptical as to my reasons but gave in.

It was horseback all the way. But the other operation wasn't as far off as I thought. Posada explained how it was they were so close together.

"Their's is an older lease. It started out as copper, but sometime a few years ago they found vanadium deposits. Which of course brought the thought of tungsten. It never panned out. Then one of their surveyors found that there was considerable iron deposits in the region adjoining ours. They bought in all the way to our boundary. Then they asked Gonsales to sell. He refused. So they threatened. And still he refused. So today we are a pair of armed camps."

"I still don't understand why Gonsales is worried," I said.

"That's not hard to explain," Posada said. "He has six more months to produce in. We speak of Gonsales as the owner. Actually it is a closed corporation. And one of the articles is a stipulation the mine has to be productive within two years of the start of operations. And though he owns a great deal of stock, he has only a large voice. Not the controlling voice. Understand."

I understood. He was in the middle. The stockholders could play freeze-out, but he couldn't. Yet it was the kind of freeze-out they wouldn't benefit by. I saw the whole lay-out then.

We topped a narrow ridge and came into view of the Ensenada Property, as it was called. There was a wire fence all around the central compound where the offices and final check rooms were. It wasn't as large as our place, nor were there as many men to be seen. But I had no doubt but that when the time

came, they could be found, and all armed.

THAT fence was barbed. There were several openings at which armed guards were stationed. We drew our horses to a panting stop before one of the gates, and two men approached us. I saw they were both armed with sub-machine guns.

"We would like to see Senhor Schmidt," Posada said.

One looked to the other and said:

"Wait here. I will let him know."

There was a phone connection hanging from one of the posts. He lifted the transmitter and whispered something into it, his eyes giving us a cold once-over. He nodded several times, as a voice answered, and at the end hung up, and turning to us, shook his head for us to enter.

The group of building we saw from the ridge was fully a half mile from the fence, and we were proceeded by one of the armed men, who had a horse hobbled nearby.

There was another fence, even more heavily guarded than the farther outpost, when we reached a point about a hundred yards from the main buildings. A large gate swung open at our approach . . . electric eye operation, I guessed, and we rode up to a few yards of the building. A man came out at the sound of our horses approach, and stood on the low stoop waiting us.

Posada introduced us. He turned out to be the main cog in the wheel of the Ensenada, Senhor Schmidt, no less.

He was quite a guy as far as size went. Maybe about six feet tall, heavy in the arms and shoulders, with a thick neck, he had a thickflat nose, high cheekbones and a crew haircut. He wore glasses which sheltered small, mean-looking eyes. They looked steadily at us, and his lips were compressed

in a thin line, down-drawn at the corners. He didn't like our company, I was sure.

Well, he was going to like us less before long. I came right to the point.

"So you're Schmidt?" I said. "Well, it's no pleasure meeting you, I assure you."

"Did you come here to insult me?" he asked in a heavy, accented voice. "If you did, then out you go. I want you not here."

"Sure," I said, "that's exactly why I came here. To insult you. And to tell you I don't like you and to tell you that the next time there'll be trouble at the mine you're going to be damned sorry about it. Now how do you like that?"

"I do not like that, as you say. And I should have you shot here, while you are standing talking as you are. But Rheinhold Schmidt is not that kind of man. No. I would rather wait to see if you are as big a fool as I think. And now that you have said your say, please be good enough to go off this property."

I gave the boys the high sign and we turned our horses around, and with the same guard accompanying us, rode back the way we came. I could feel Posada's wondering glance on my back as we rode along. As for Diego, the whole thing was a mystery to him, since Schmidt had spoken in English. Only Smitty had an idea what was in my mind.

Late that afternoon, after I made sure we wouldn't be disturbed either by Jessie or Ribins, I called a conclave of the men. I spoke in Spanish for the benefit of Diego. He was going to be an important part of my scheme.

"Maybe you thought my way was a little brusque, perhaps a lot foolish, warning Schmidt. But in matters of this kind I've had a lot of experience, as Smitty can tell you. And I found

out, early, that the only way to deal with a snake is to beat him to the punch. Not all snakes rattle their warning.

"That's been the trouble here. You've all been waiting for the warning rattle. So there wasn't any and you got caught with your pants down. From now on we do the hitting first. And Diego, you're men are going to carry the ball.

"There's only one way for his men to come into our backyard. Through that narrow pass. From now on there's always going to be a guard there, on both sides. That'll take care of the pass. Diego, my boy, do you think you and about six of your men can live off the country for about a week?"

"It will not be the first time."

"Then we've settled another point. Because you're going to go right into Senhor Schmidt's backyard. I don't know how you're going to get over the fence. That's your problem. Scout around. See how many men he's got. If you have any idea that they're going to be too many, wreck their place, smash their guns, do anything including murder, but stop them before they get to us. Can do?"

"Can do," Diego said emphatically.

"Now," I said, speaking directly to Posada, "what about those Indians? How do they get in? How many to a raiding party and how well are they armed?"

"**Y**OU came up the Santasima River and landed at the town of Santasima," Posada said carefully, as though he wanted to impress on mind what he was going to say. "For about twenty miles past the town the river winds into the hills. Then it bends in a half moon, goes through a series of rapids and ends in a basin country which lies two miles from here. It is much lower in altitude, heavy jungle growth, impossible to navigate. That is the land of the

Iribis. We cannot go to them. But . . ."

"We can stop them from coming here, right?" I said.

"That is up to you," he said.

"So okay, they're going to be stopped. Do you know how they come in?"

"Yes. I had a party of men follow them. They came in many war canoes. Luckily, there's only a single place where they can land, because the river is too rough beyond and before that spot. As for their arms it's mostly bow and arrow, sometimes blow gun. Never guns or rifles."

"We'll handle them like I had to handle a bunch of Chinese on the Yangtse. Like I said before, this country reminds me a great deal of that. But first I'd rather try diplomacy. You said before, that once you were on good terms with them. What happened?"

"I don't really know," Posada said. "One day we were friends, the next they were our avowed enemies. Yet we did nothing to make that situation."

"No. But someone else did, I'll bet," I said. "And I know the skunk who did. Schmidt. Probably used an old trick. Like telling them they owned the land and that they should take it back. It's been found successful before. Well, we'll try to talk them out of it. If that doesn't work we'll hit them, too, where it hurts."

"Which leaves us with the last problem, the explosions in the mine. How do we cope with that?"

"Somebody handles dynamite. Who? Or is it another kind of explosion? Give me the details," I said.

"I'm at sea there," Posada said sadly. "The last one blew out four feet of tunnel and killed twelve men. It also stopped work for three days."

"Diego, you'll have to be the boy for that. Got any ideas on the subject?"

"Pinto. He can find out more in ten

minutes than we could in a lifetime. People think his size makes him an excellent confidant. He could worm his way into a snake's confidence."

It was arranged then. Pinto to go to work as a machine man's helper, which would place him at the scene of operations, and make him familiar with dynamite, Diego and six of his men to the Ensenada, and Posada to get hold of the Iribis chief for a conference.

IT TOOK three days before we could get hold of the head man. I saw a lot of Jessie in those days. Ribins had work to do. He was the consulting engineer and he and Posada had details which kept them both busy. In the meantime Jessie and I went for rides in the hills. It was quite peaceful.

It was early afternoon, and Smitty and I were in the cabin. He was cleaning his guns as usual. Posada had given him the run of the small armory they had at the mine. We'd lost our guns back at Sao Paulo when we were shanghaied. Now Smitty had a rifle and a pair of .38's. I took a .45 automatic for myself. I liked the kind of gun would stop a man even when he got hit in a place that wouldn't prove fatal.

There was a wild rapping at the door, and when I opened it a small native boy stood outside, his face glistening with sweat, and his lips trembling with excitement.

"Senhor. Come quickly."

He turned and started off as though the devil were on his heels.

"Get those heaters on," I yelled to Smitty, though the kid hadn't said anything to make me think trouble was on the make. But it was in his air, in the fright of his eyes. Smitty tossed me the .45 and the holster with the twin belts of cartridges, and we were off on the run.

The kid led us straight to Posada's

office.

Pinto was there, an excited Pinto. He was shooting a stream of words at Posada. Every now and then his arms would wave wildly as he accented something.

"Pinto has found the men who are responsible for the damage," Posada explained quickly, as he too buckled on a pistol. "But we must go quickly. He says they are ready to let go. He barely escaped with his life. They took him into their confidence . . ." we were running like mad for a truck, parked for emergency in the compound . . . "He says they've enough explosive to blow the main tunnel to kingdom come. And there are a hundred men in there. Pinto says . . ." the truck roared away in high gear, and we went out of the compound on two wheels and hit the road for the mine at sixty . . . "they are on the other side, where we shot in a new stope."

POSADA was driving. I was sitting beside him, and Pinto and Smitty were in the rear. Posada kept talking while the truck carreened down the narrow road:

"It'll have to be fast work. I don't have time to call others. Think we're enough?"

"I don't know," I said bleakly. "I've got to see what's what, first."

We drew up in a cloud of dust before the main portal. A man had just rolled out a dump truck. He looked at us with amazement as we piled out of the truck and started on a run down the roadbed. It was a hell of a long way in, about nine hundred feet. Then we came to a turn and Pinto piled down a low, dimly lit cavernous tunnel. Suddenly, far ahead, and gleaming like glow worms in the dark, came the bright glow of lanterns.

Pinto drew up sharply. Whirling, he

grabbed my arms and whispered something to me. But I didn't understand him. Posada came to the rescue.

"He says to go cautiously. There are guards here somewhere."

Once more Pinto took the lead. He was bent over, his free hand moving along the damp wall while with his other he gripped the pistol tightly. We followed in close order. The lights from the lanterns grew a little brighter until we were able to make figures. There were six of them, all busily engaged in running or connecting fuses. The foundation had evidently been laid. These were the last steps. We weren't late, but we had not long to go.

Suddenly the lights went out. And Pinto, who was directly in front of me, disappeared. I groped my way through the sudden darkness, and saw him again. He had only moved around a bend in the tunnel. I followed him, heard the rest come after me, and felt the presence of another. There were deep recesses in the walls and from one of those recesses a figure leaped out upon me.

My yell warned the others. Then the narrow tunnel was alive with figures, men who were armed with knives.

I threw up an arm, sheer reflex, and a knife clattered to the floor. By chance his thrust had been downward and my forearm caught the blow intended for my body. I felt a bare body against mine and brought my knee up. It landed in his groin. He groaned and the fingers trying to grip my throat slackened their grip. I had the .45 out so I brought both my arms up, my fingers entwined in a judo blow, and struck downward. They caught him on the bridge of his nose and his blood spattered me. He fell back and I hit him with the side of the gun. He sank to the floor without a sound.

I became aware of sounds, shouts of

the men who were attacking us, warning those ahead to hurry. I turned and saw Smitty, facing the wall, the rifle held on a piece of rock. He was aiming it straight down the corridor. Behind him, Posada was battling with two men. One of them went down. Then I saw another. He had made himself inconspicuous by standing as close to the wall as possible. I saw him . . . he had a knife in his hand. I yelled a warning just as he brought his arm back in a throwing gesture. I don't know whether Smitty heard my scream of warning. I threw a shot from my hip. I heard it hit the rock with a loud smack. Then his arm came forward and I shot at the same time. But the knife had left it before I saw his head snap back. He was dead when I reached him. A .45 can tear a man's throat open. This one did.

But I was aware of only one other sound. The booming crash of the rifle. Smitty hadn't been hit. Maybe the sound of my first shot had thrown the killer off balance but the knife had passed under Smitty's arm, so close it tore the cloth of his shirt, and embedded itself in a crack.

I looked to where Smitty was aiming and saw a man lying on the ground beside a battery detonator. Another was reaching for the plunger and Smitty fired again. This one fell on his side. Smitty didn't take any more chances. The next guy got his before he could reach it. Then Pinto was racing toward them, his gun held low like a pistol and spitting like a machine gun. Two others fell under his fire. The other two broke and ran.

"NO QUESTION about it," Posada said after looking over the detonator, "this would have really turned the trick. If that load they've got had gone off, we'd have been out of busi-

ness."

Pinto had traced the wires down to the dynamite. They had packed twenty cases of the stuff in various places in the main tunnel. It was a hell of a good job. What surprised me was that no one had suspected them. Yet they had done it openly, Pinto explained. It was probably the reason no one had thought anything of it. They had thought it was part of their job. We called in several laborers to cart off the stiffs, not that we had to go far to get them; the sound of firing had attracted a full house.

Posada gave them the names of the two men who had escaped and searching parties went to look for them. I had an idea they would not bother bringing the fugitive back alive. It was just as well. We had no prison for them.

It was there in the tunnel I got a brilliant idea. Posada had mentioned that most of the men were working the main line. I told him what was in my mind and he agreed. In a half hour he had the entire force assembled. It was quite a sight. About two hundred men gathered there in the murky gloom of the huge tunnel, men whose bodies gleamed dully with sweat, whose eyes were like the eyes of animals. They leaned against their shovels and picks or squatted on their haunches as is the way with country people the world over. They listened in silence, breaking only to mutter to their neighbors, as Posada outlined my plan. I kept prompting him.

In short, Posada explained, he thought it was time the Indians were taught a lesson. Besides, he wondered how long the men were going to stand being attacked. If they liked seeing their friends die, their homes burned, their lives at stake, it was up to them. But here, Posada became highly dramatic at that point, showing the elabo-

rate plans to blow them to hell, his voice rising on a pleading note, it was all right with him. But, if they wanted to do something about it, he had a plan for them. Their voices rose as one. Tell us how. Show us how!

It was quite simple. We had arms almost for all of them. We would simply lay a trap for them. Like Schmidt's way to the mine, the Indians had to travel certain paths. A constant guard would be maintained at all the points along the route, with enough men and material, dynamite, to be specific, to block their retreat. Posada told them he had received word their chief did not want any more talk. He wanted only the land which he said belonged to them. It meant, in short, that another attack was in the offing. Were the men with him?

They were.

Then and there, Posada appointed watchers, mapped the campaign. The Indians were going to be given a royal reception this time. Someone asked how soon the arms would be distributed and Posada told them. That very night. Diego's men had reported odd activities among the Indians. Signs of a big show were in evidence. The foremen Posada named were to distribute the arms. It was going to be a hell of a show, all right.

WE WALKED back to the supe's shack. Posada had nothing but admiration for Smitty's shooting. He had always been skeptical of Smitty's worth. The little guy was such a palpable coward. It was hard to understand how, when the point of danger was reached, he could lose his fear, in fact lose all consciousness of self, and know only that he had a gun in his hand. That gun was his god, would never desert him, would never fail him.

"Well, things are certainly coming

to a head," Posada said. "I got word this morning about the Indians. I was going to let you know this afternoon. Then Pinto, here, came with his little tale of woe. But now everything is all right. That shooting party in the mine did the trick. It was the first time something was done about accidents. And in one fell swoop, we got rid of the saboteurs. Fine! Now for the number two of our enemies. I have an odd feeling they will come tonight. The men get off at about four. We'll distribute the dynamite and arms right afterward, and send the parties out. Diego's men will show them where to lie in wait for their return. I've rigged up those large floodlights. This time they'll be attacking in broad daylight. Y'know, Gowan, I can hardly wait for them to come."

"How about the women and children?" I asked. "What are you going to do with them?"

"They'll be warned in plenty of time," he said. "We'll get them out of their houses and shift them out here. There is plenty room for them in the main storehouses. I'll give orders to do that just before dark. Which reminds me, the other shift will also have to be told. I won't have enough arms for them, but somehow we'll manage."

"We'd better," I said. "Well, I guess our work is done for now. I'm going back to our place. Coming, Smitty?"

"Nah. I'll stick around with Posada; maybe he's got something for me to do."

I grinned in deep affection at the little shrimp. Posada had nothing for him to do. But he knew I wanted to be alone with Jessie.

I met her coming up the walk to the office. She saw me and stopped and waited for me.

"Was there something wrong?" she asked.

I turned her around and started back

to her place. And as we walked back I told her what had happened. And what was going to happen tonight.

"**R**IBINS!" she exclaimed. "He rode off early this morning. Said he needed the exercise. I hope he gets back in time."

"He'd better," I said. "I don't think the Indians are going to wait to see whether he's safe or not."

"He should be," she said thoughtfully. "He stopped by early this morning and said he was just going to ride through the hills. It never takes us more than a couple of hours."

"Yes. But we never go as far as the Ensenada," I said.

"Look," she stopped suddenly and faced me. "I thought we weren't going to go into that again?"

"I thought so too. But things are boiling to a head. And I'd like to know where I stand. I still think Ribins is a crook, that he's hand and glove with Schmidt, and that sooner or later he is going to show his hand. I just want to warn you to be on the watch for him. Not to be taken in too much by him."

"And I'll thank you to watch for yourself. You're so darned sure of yourself, aren't you," she snapped.

We were back where we started on the train. She defending Ribins and I . . . Well just making a fool of myself. Because the more I stuck it up the guy, the more she stuck it up me. I couldn't win that way.

"No, I'm not sure of myself at all," I said. "That's why I don't know what's going to happen when I do this."

I took her in my arms and kissed her. It was our second kiss and it wasn't at all like the first. She was as rigid as marble in my arms and her lips were hard against mine, nor did they relax as I continued my pressure. I let her go and looked at her. She was bitter.

"Always the bully boy," she said. Her face was white as snow. Her eyes were large and beautiful and wild with anger. "That's the way you always work, isn't it? Force. Power. I'm sorry, but that won't work with me. And from now on, please keep your distance."

She turned and strode away, her back as straight as a plumb line.

I whistled a cheerless tune as I went back to my shack. Good old Gowan. The bull in the china shop. Maybe it *was* better this way. I had no doubts on the score. I loved her, the first woman I'd known since Mary, and the first I'd given a second look at, or thought to. It had been a long time. Too long, perhaps.

I lay back on my cot and stared up at the ceiling. The pay-off would not be long in coming. I could bring in my report, that is if I lived, and take my pay and forget all about her. There were lands, places I hadn't seen. The Security Council of the United Nations had many jobs for me. This wasn't the toughest I'd known.

I stopped kidding myself and became a normal human for once. It was the toughest assignment I'd ever had. I'd never fallen in love on any of the others. It was kill or be killed on those. No complications. It had always been cut and dried. A job to be done, that was all.

I knew she wasn't in love with Ribins. But the way I was going about things she would be pushed into it. The hell with it, I thought. She wasn't for me anyway.

Oddly enough I slept then.

It was almost dark when Smitty woke me.

"Better get up, Bull," he said, shaking me. "Posada says he's getting the women and kids out now. We'd better hike down to the office."

"Where's Miss Gonsales?" I asked.

"She's already there," Smitty said.

"Did Ribins show up?"

"**Y**EAH. About an hour ago. And he and Posada have been going round and round on this deal. Ribins thinks it's a lot of hot air, and that we're all going to get in a jam with the government. He says we'll be up for murder if we go through with it."

"To hell with Ribins," I said, as I forced my legs into my trousers. "I'll take care of him when the time comes."

Posada and Ribins were still going round, when Smitty and I reached the office. He whirled on me as I opened the door. I always managed to do something to the guy, just as I did back in Chicago on the park bench.

"You!" he yelled. "You're the cause of it. Murder! That's what they'll call it. I will not stand for it. I have the final say on anything which transpires here. And I forbid what you want to do."

"You're a little late, Ribins," I said coldly. "It's been done. What's more, don't try to stop us."

"I can't stop you," he said bitterly. "But, by God, when I get back to Rio I'm going to see to it you'll get your deserts."

"Speaking of deserts," I said, walking close to him, "I'm going to shove yours down your throat."

He looked at my balled-up fingers and backed away a trifle.

"Don't get scared," I said. "I've got more important things on my mind right now. But there will come a day . . ."

"Aah!" he growled and stamped from the room.

"He's not the kind to let things like that be forgotten," Posada said. "I would watch my step. Remember what you said about snakes not always

rattling?"

"Yeah. But he's not a rattler. So I'll always be on the watch," I said.

Posada shrugged his shoulders, as if to say, that, my friend, will be your funeral, not mine.

"Everything set-up?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Yes. If anything happens, we'll know long in advance."

"Okay," I said. "I'm going over to the storeroom. I want to see Miss Gonsales. She'll have to keep the women and kids quiet if they attack tonight."

A hundred pairs of frightened eyes turned toward me as I stepped into the long, high warehouse. Jessie was busy calming down a frightened woman. She didn't see me. I watched her soothe the woman with gentle reassuring words. The woman calmed down. I looked around and saw that already some of the women were setting up small alcohol stoves. Others were shepherding the children into some semblance of order. They'd be all right.

Jessie turned then, and saw me. She stepped away from her charge and walked to me. Her lips were soft inviting invitations. But this time I didn't accept.

"Look, honey," I said. "There's going to be a lot of shooting. Don't get frightened. And above all, don't let them get frightened. We don't want panic on our hands. We might be pretty busy."

"I know," she said. "I've been talking to some of the women. I guess they know a lot more about what's going on than I do, or did. You go ahead with your job. I'll take care of mine."

I looked around once more, smiled at her, and started to leave. She stopped me.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" she asked.

I DIDN'T get it. Then she smiled, and I didn't wait for a second invitation. Her lips yielded their soft sweetness to me this time of their own will. Her arms tightened strongly about me, then relaxed.

"Better go now," she whispered. "Before I lose my strength and keep you here with me."

I was just in time to see the truck pull up.

Two men got out and I raced them to the office. They were a couple of the watchers.

"The Indians!" they shouted as they piled through the door. "They are on the march. The whole tribe. Hundreds of them. And this time they have guns."

"So Schmidt's armed them," I said. "Well that'll make it a little more tough. But we can still take them. Get set to go, Posada," I said. "Time's a wastin'."

Posada didn't wait for further tidings. He sent an electrician to the generator plant to get ready the huge floodlights we'd set up. The rest of us went outside. Smitty had his rifle all set to do its deadly work. Men were coming up the incline to the office in long lines. Posada had stationed his lieutenants at various points to give the men their orders. The armory doors were open, and rifles were being handed out as quickly as they could thrust them into the brown paws ready to take them.

Soon armed men made their way down the quiet, darkened streets to wait at hidden vantage points for the Indians to arrive. Smitty, Posada and I waited in the office. This was the center of operations, I thought. We wouldn't be of much use out there. The men were in fever pitch of excitement. I only hoped they wouldn't lose their heads, but wait as we had instructed them to, until the Indians got well into town. Then let them have it with the

cross-fire.

I looked out to the circle of flood lights. Those big babies would spell victory or defeat for us. There was a direct connection between the office and the plant. Posada had but to lift the phone and the men at the other end would shoot the works.

Silence settled on us. We licked our lips and waited for the fun to start. From the office windows we got a panoramic view of the whole scene. Down below, where the road wound down to the point where it branched off, one branch leading to the basin country, the other to the Ensenada, I saw a cloud of dust approaching. It wasn't coming from the basin side! I called Posada over and we watched the cloud roll nearer. In a few minutes, though darkness had almost settled on the countryside, I made out that it was a group of horsemen. Something made me think of Diego and his men. I was right. We ran to meet them.

Diego leaped from his horse even before it skidded to a halt. He had news for us all right. The worst possible news.

"Schmidt! He is coming. With a whole army. Armored trucks, machine guns. The whole works. They aren't more than ten miles behind us."

Posada worked his lips helplessly. The news shocked him profoundly and made light the whole business of preparation we had gone through. Schmidt's men would arrive first. And if they had armored trucks and machine guns . . .

"Posada! Get some men to rip dynamite apart. We'll use cans and make Molotov cocktails. There's a couple of fast, small trucks I can use. We'll beat them to it. Load the trucks with gas and we'll take off. Smitty, you, Pinto and Diego come along with me."

We shot down the road. I was at the

wheel. Smitty and Pinto were in the rear, Diego sat beside me. His black beard seemed to stand away from his face in excitement. His voice crackled with it:

"I know the place. I tell you it will be one great party, if we can reach it before them. They'll have to come through this narrow little place, like a canyon that forgot to grow, and so full of rocks . . . Oh, we will have fun, Bull!"

Behind us the other truck, full of men, roared after us. There was a full moon and the hills were full of strange light. The whole scene looked theatrical.

"Slow," Diego warned. "We come to it. After the turn . . . Now watch!"

HE WAS right. It was a devil's road. Narrow, twisting, rock-filled, there was room for a single car to move, and only at great care. No speed could be gotten up here. And once in the two hundred yard or so of twisting road, there was no turning back. The only way of retreat was to go in reverse. I waited for the other truck to come up. The men piled out. Quickly I sent them up to the tops of the small ridges which overlooked the gully. There was a muted roaring sound coming from somewhere ahead. I took time to study our position. There were huge boulders behind which a man could hide, lying alongside the road. Pinto scurried forward until he was halfway through. Suddenly he disappeared. I looked up to where I had sent the six men from the other truck. They too had faded into thin air. But they had the sinister bottles and cans of inflammables with them, and at the proper time would send down the liquid fire.

It was now time for Diego and Smitty and I to go to work. Diego lifted the case of dynamite to his shoulder and we

started down the road at a trot. At about the point where Pinto had hidden himself behind a boulder, we set the case down. In a few seconds, Diego ripped the case open. There wasn't time to dig holes for the dynamite. We just tied sticks together and inserted caps and fuse and set them into the road, the while we retreated. That was in case some of the trucks got through. Then we lighted the two feet long fuse and ran back. For already we heard the sounds of the trucks more plainly. In a moment they would be on us.

Pinto and the others played it smart. They let the first three trucks go by; there were fifteen in the group, and waited until the procession was at the half-way point. Then things began to rip.

There was a roar, a burst of flame and a shower of stones as the first of the sticks went off. And at the same time the cocktails began to flame against the sides of the trucks in the middle. Machine guns began a wild chattering as the men in the trucks shot at phantom marks. The other sticks went off. When the smoke cleared away, only the first truck was seen to have gotten through. We fell to the ground as it passed us. I heard a grunt of pain from my left, where Diego was, then the truck passed us. I leaped forward and knelt by Diego's side. A machine gun slug had ripped through the fleshy part of his arm. There was a lot of blood but it hadn't struck the bone. I tied a tourniquet around the arm. Beside us, Smitty was on one knee, the rifle snuggled against his shoulder.

Flames were shooting from the trucks, making the scene nightmare bright. Men were screaming in agony as the fire reached them. A truck blew up in a sheet of flame and shower of sparks. Slowly, Smitty stood up and

walked over.

"Might as well get back. Those guys out there ain't got no fight left in them. Besides, I recognized the Schmidt character in the lead truck."

I thought the figure had been familiar.

"I saw light spark from his glasses," Smitty explained. "He was sittin' alongside the driver."

In a few seconds the men came scrambling back. Not one even had as much as a scratch. Once more we rolled, this time back to town.

We heard the wild yelling while we were still a mile off. I looked in vain for the brilliant glow which should have been the floodlights. But only the moon lighted our way. I felt the grip of fear around my heart. And for once, Diego was silent. I didn't like the darkness any more. I wanted, more than anything on earth, to see lights, huge lights. Not this fear-filled darkness which had swallowed the town. And those wild shouts? What did they mean?

WE SAW the flames then. First a single flame, then more, until it seemed the whole town was ablaze. The gas pedal went clear to the floor, and the truck leaped forward like a frightened rabbit.

We skirted the town, came in from the side, where there was a road leading to the office. All about us rifles blazed in winking spurts of flame. Figures sprawled along the road. But we could not tell friend from foe. It was only when the flames spat toward us that we knew we were running the gauntlet. The windshield shattered into a thousand fragments as a bullet passed between Diego and me. Another struck the wooden seat beside my shoulder. Then we were past them.

I hit the dirt and skidded to a halt

in front of the office. The windows were alive to me. All the glass was shot out and the snouts of rifles poured a steady stream of bullets into the night. The other truck pulled up and men leaped from it and ran up the stairs after me.

Posada, a bloody rag tied around his arm, was sitting in a chair, talking to one of his men. His eyes lighted when he saw us.

"Hurt bad?" I asked first.

He shook his head. "A trifle. But disaster . . . I am glad you came. I don't know what to do."

"The lights?" I asked. "What happened to them?"

"Ribins!" Posada spat the name out as though it were something so vile it embittered his taste. "Schmidt and a truckload of men came in a while back. Ribins was waiting for them. I thought it was one of our trucks. Too late I saw it wasn't. And by that time, they had driven away to the power plant. They're there now."

"So that's why the lights aren't on," I said. "Well, they're stuck there. First we've got to take care of those Indians. How are things? Give it to me fast."

"We got the jump on them," Posada said. "They walked into our ambush. But there were hundreds of them. And they are fanatics. They'll fight to the last man."

I didn't like that. I looked out of the window. It seemed every house in the town was ablaze. I could see the bodies of men lying like bundles of rags in the streets. Most of them were naked but for breech clouts. Indians.

We had to get those lights on.

"All right, Smitty, Pinto," I said. "Looks like we've got to get back to work. If it's dark for us it's also dark for them. They can't see us either. Get it?"

Smitty nodded and I told Diego to translate to Pinto.

"We'll sneak up from three sides. . . No, better make it the front, even though that'll be more dangerous. We've got to get in the door. Posada, got anybody who can operate those lights?"

"Only me," he said. "So let's get going. Time, to quote you, is wastin'."

What a man! I thought!

Pinto was like a snake, the way he wormed his way forward. He had a stick of dynamite in his teeth and a fuse in his belt. He had the most dangerous job, getting to the door and blowing it open.

Time after time, we hit the dirt and stayed put. Clouds had come up, obscuring the face of the moon. And every time a cloud would pass, we'd have to duck low. Posada was in great pain, but he kept his teeth clenched, and only now and then would a small sound of protest pass his lips.

SMITTY was to one side. It was his duty to make sure not a man opposed us when the door was blown. I saw him stop moving and knew he was set. Pinto was about thirty feet from the shack. I saw him get to his knees. And at that very instant the moon came out. I saw him kneel, doing something to the stick of dynamite in his hand, then a shower of sparks leaped from his palm and he was running full-speed for the power house.

I shouted aloud, warnings to watch out. For they too had seen Pinto. First there was the roar of a single rifle. Then came the chatter of a machine gun. He was only a few feet from the house and he fell. The machine gun kept up its chattering, as though it weren't satisfied Pinto was dead.

I think I screamed aloud when I saw the small figure stagger erect, and begin a wavering trot forward again. He was hit at least once more; I saw his

body jerk as the slugs ripped him, but nothing, not even death, could stop him. He fell, the stick still grasped in his fingers.

The door opened, there was a flare of light from behind to show us the dozen or so men grouped near. And Smitty's rifle began a slow chant of death for them. One, two, three fell, and a man ran out, knelt by Pinto's side. Smitty's rifle began a quickened fire; it was an automatic, but the man at Pinto's side bore a charmed life. We saw him grab the stick of dynamite from the dead hand, saw the hand go back in a throwing gesture. Then everything became a vast sheet of orange flame. The dynamite had gone off in his hand!

We got up even before the flame died, and ran forward full-speed for the house. The whole side had caved in. I leaped over the sprawled figures of some. Posada stopped, got his bearings, and made for a side room from which a light gleamed behind the closed door. I heard Smitty behind me, knew he'd cover with his pistols, and ran toward the room with Posada.

I was only dimly aware that Smitty's and another's gun had gone off simultaneously. I was only aware of the tableaux as Posada flung the door open.

Ribins was standing, facing an immense generator. He had a gun in his hand. He turned his head and Posada started forward, screaming his anger. Ribins whirled, took careful aim and collapsed. I had been a little faster. There was a blue-black hole just at the hairline. And the whole back of his head was a bloody mess. But Posada was too busy to pay any attention to anything but the generator. His hands were busy at switches. And suddenly it was daylight outside.

THERE wasn't much to it from then on. The Indians broke and ran

with the first blaze of light.

We sat in the office, Jessie, Posada, Smitty, Diego and I.

"Who was it you knocked off in the shack, Smitty?" I asked.

"Schmidt. He was laying there. I spotted him just as he was taking a pot shot at you. I shot first, that's all."

"We seem to be lucky that way, shooting first," I said.

"And Ribins," Jessie said, "was only a stooge. So you *were* right."

"He was more than a stooge," I said. "Just as I am more than Bull Gowan, adventurer."

They looked at me as though I had lost my mind.

"Oh, I'm Gowan, all right," I explained. "Only I am more than you think. Just as this mine is more than you let on it is."

I heard Posada suck in his breath sharply. Jessie still looked bewildered.

"You know what I mean, don't you, Posada?"

His eyes fell before mine.

"You see," I went on, "I am an agent. An agent for the greatest power on earth, the security council of the United Nations."

"What are you trying to tell us?" Jessie broke out.

"That," Posada said wearily, "your father and his friends were having a bad dream. I advised them against it but they wouldn't listen. Gowan, you must believe me, Gonsales had no ulterior motives. He wanted to benefit Brazil first, and humanity, too."

"You see, Jessie, this mine is not tungsten productive. There's something far more precious they were seeking here. Plutonium. The most precious metal in the world, and the deadliest. For the atom is made from it. Now do you understand?"

"You mean my father . . . is a - traitor?"

"No," I said. "Your father is not a traitor, nor is anyone else. Schmidt, Ribins and Posada made a mistake."

"Mistake? What do you mean?" Posada was dumbfounded.

"It was a natural mistake. You found evidence of plutonium. There is no denying that. So you told Gonsales. But you are an engineer first and geologist and scientist last. You weren't sure. So Gonsales called in Ribins. That's where we heard about it and got our initial dope.

"Ribins was a foreign agent during the war. We let him free purposely. Sooner or later, we knew he'd lead us to others we wanted. The control of uranium and plutonium is controlled in the strictest sense. And each country in the council must report each discovery.

"When Ribins came to Brazil we were naturally curious. He had been known to have worked on an atom project in Norway, the heavy water one. So we sent men down here. Nothing. I was called in on the job. I went to Rio and scouted around. I found out certain odd facts. That Schmidt and Ribins had been friends. I knew all about the corporation and I knew somebody in high position which made it possible for me to get in.

"It was the somebody who, above the protests of Ribins, gave the idea to your father to hire me and Smitty. I knew Smitty was in Chicago. Your father fell in with the idea. The investigation of the men brought forward was in the hands of a friend. Of course the choice was Smitty and me. That's how I was in Chicago."

"But my father? What about him?"

"Nothing about him. I told you, a mistake was made. The reason why I was chosen by the council was I am a scientist, one of those who worked on the Los Alamos project for the U. S. I

know as much as anyone about plutonium. Why do you think I took those horseback rides with you?"

She was too bewildered to think of a reason.

"To study the ground, to look at the tailings at the mill, to see if there was rock formations, ore bodies which had to be present. There were some. But not enough for large scale operations. And unknown to Posada, I went into the mine, from stem to stern. Nothing. Yet, oddly enough, there was evidence of tungsten. Did you know that?"

Posada shook his head. "I knew very little of that," he said. "That was Ribins' affair."

"And he was so busy, looking for the other, he couldn't see the light for the dust in his eyes. So there isn't anything for me but to report back, except a valuable deposit of tungsten. Your father is in the clear, Jessie. I really know it."

Tears streamed down her face at the words. I bit my lips, took a last look at her lovely face, signalled Smitty and started out. She caught me at the bottom of the stairs.

"Won't you find it hard to get along with yourself?" she asked, her strong fingers gripping my forearm. "Especially if you leave me here in this horrible place?"

"But . . . But," I stuttered. Somehow, Smitty got lost.

"So now that you can't accuse me of not loving me you have lost your tongue. Will I have to find another to make you jealous again?"

"Baby," I said. "I'll never be jealous again."

"I might not like that, either," she said.

She couldn't say anything else. It's pretty hard when lips as strong as mine are pressing against your own.

THE END

A HERO OF THE MINES

By BARRY CRALE

Duggan feared nothing—not even a mine-fire!

HEROISM and incredible courage exist in some men. These qualities make their presence known, and their owners become outstanding, when there happens a catastrophe which sends ordinary men into terror and despair. Manus Duggan was one of those rare men. His bravery and self-sacrifice were displayed during one of the most disastrous fires in the history of mining in the West. This occurred in the Speculator mine at Butte, Montana, in the year 1917.

Because of the many terrible accidents which had taken place during former years, the owners of this mine had taken every precaution to keep accidents at a minimum and had installed modern safety improvements and practices and drilled the men in their use. Yet in the dangerous occupation of mining something unforeseen may quickly take a frightful toll of lives and property. In the Speculator fire, one hundred and sixty-three men lost their lives, and twenty-five others were saved only by a miracle. Damage to the mine was estimated at a million dollars.

On that day in June, 1917, a large insulated electric cable was being lowered into the mine to be used in connection with the ventilating fans. It became entangled, and hung suspended in the shaft. Workmen had been trying for some time to free it. An assistant foreman, carrying his carbide light, was inspecting the cable. Somehow, his light came into contact with a frayed edge of the cable.

The insulation caught on fire. The mine shaft was like a chimney. In an instant the entire cable was on fire, and it was but a matter of seconds before the entire three thousand feet of dry timber making the shaft was a blazing inferno. As the flames shot upward, deadly smoke and gas were forced below, into every level of the mine. More than nine hundred men were in the mine at the time. Many of them, upon catching a first whiff of smoke, escaped through connections with adjoining mines. A great number, however, were trapped, or killed without warning by the gases.

Ambulances, fire-fighting equipment and rescuers by the score waited anxiously at the mouth

of the blazing shaft for the fire to burn itself out so that rescue work could begin. When it seemed possible, over a dozen volunteers descended in a mine cage, only to meet a blast of the gas at the bottom and perish in an instant. Then it was decided that fresh air must be pumped in as fast as possible, before any rescue work could be done. Two days and a night passed from the time the fire started until the safety engineers pronounced the air in the mine safe for rescue squads to begin bringing up the bodies of the victims. No hope remained, by that time, for the lives of anyone in the mine.

SUDDENLY, a signal flash was heard from the depths. Quickly the mine cage descended, and came up with nine haggard, blackened miners; and down it went for more. Altogether, twenty-five men were brought back as if from the dead. These men, and three others, led by one Manus Duggan, had gathered together in a cross-cut in the mine as soon as they heard of the fire. Realizing that the lethal gas would soon appear, they built a bulkhead of dirt, timber, and anything else they could find that might keep the gas from penetrating to them. Spurred on by Duggan, even forced by him to remain where they were rather than make a break that would surely mean death, they reinforced their barricade by plugging gaps with their clothing. Hour after long hour they remained there, the air becoming worse all the time. Finally Duggan took three men and set out to find some safer place for them all, intending to return for those left behind. The four were killed before they had gone far. The remainder, after waiting and then giving up hope of Duggan's return, decided to risk their lives in a rush for safety, rather than wait for certain death where they were. Despairingly, they started out. But by this time, the air pumps were sending pure air below. Joyfully, they were able to signal the surface, and the cage came for them. They were alive because of the courage and heroism of Manus Duggan, a common miner, who sacrificed his own life that others might live.

STORIES OF THE GODS

ONE of the most important gods in the Rada list of Haitian gods is Damballa, the god who is supposed to bring rain. When the natives sing to this god, they chant "Damballa nan l'eau—Damballa in the water." His sign is the serpent, and the sacred color symbol of this deity, which is worn while the devotee is under possession, is white. When at last one has become a full initiate of Damballa, the wearing apparel

consists of white necklaces as well as all white clothing.

Damballa is identified with St. Patrick, the patron saint of the Irish, and is especially worshipped on Thursdays, which is his day. He shares the white fig tree with Erzilie and Gran' Siligbo, two lesser gods. It is Damballa's privilege to "eat" sacrifices of white chickens and pigeons, rice, eggs, milk.—*Pete Boggs.*



The long, sleek car came tearing down at him like a roaring Juggernaut!

ANDEAN ADVENTURE

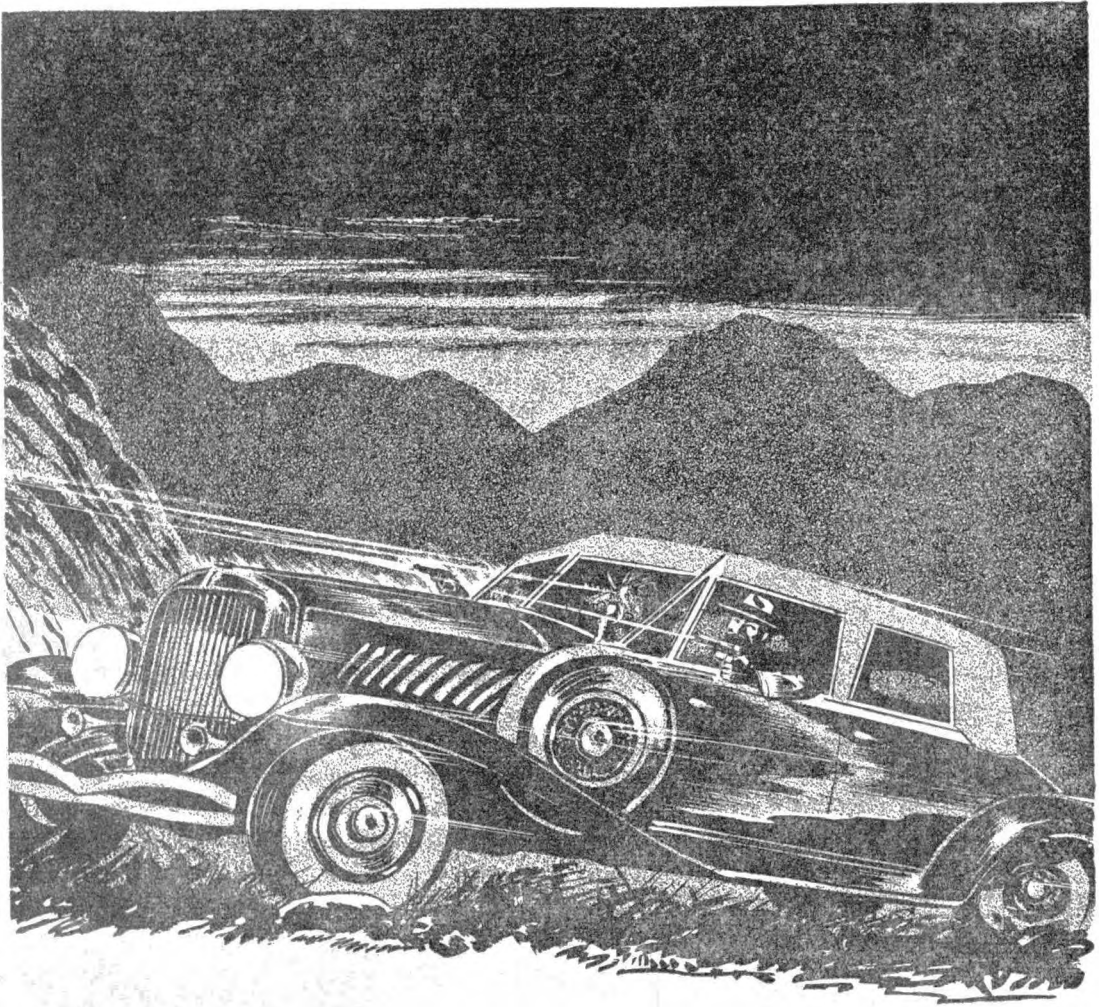
by Lester Barclay

IT'S a hell of a lot of money!" Kelson said.

Don Roseroot leaned deeper into the leather swivel-chair and wondered what the devil it was all about. Mari-Jane was waiting for him at the Golster Inn. He could almost see the amber-colored glass of synthetic Scotch

at her elbow, and could almost taste its synthetic smoky flavor. Kelson took another turn about the office and stopped suddenly before Roseroot.

"Now listen, Don!" he commanded, yet his voice had something of a plea in it. "World-Wide Coverage Assurance can't just drop two million dollars into



What did the disappearance of a plane have to do with Chilean nitrate deposits and American insurance companies? Maria Cordoba, the luscious Chilean tried to help Don find out—or did she. . .

anybody's lap that way. And that's what we'll have to do unless we go to court . . ."

Don threw both hands in front of his face in surrender.

"Hold it!" he groaned. "So far you're not making sense. Why don't you give me this whole deal, instead of just

shooting your lip to hear it clack-clack. I've got my favorite red-head waiting for me at my favorite bar, and if I know my red-heads, she won't be waiting long, not with the kind of guys hanging around that joint. So take a deep breath, pal, and slip me the bad news. Because I haven't any doubts

when you call me in, there's never any good news."

Kelson used the edge of the desk to rest his meaty calf. His shallow blue eyes probed deeply into the brown one of Roseroot and his thin lips pressed firmer against each other. It was his do-or-die look.

"A month ago, Gilbert Arlen, and don't tell me you haven't heard of him, had himself insured for a million dollars. Well, last week, Arlen took a plane to Santiago, Chile, on the first leg of a flight to Argentina . . ."

"Why Chile?" Roseroot asked. "Pan-America goes direct to Buenos Aires."

"Let me finish," Kelson said. "Seems that Arlen has large nitrate interests and he wanted to go there first . . . clean up some matters . . . his business in Argentina was going to take longer and the Chile matter couldn't wait. So he goes to Chile first. He stays over one night then charters a private plane to fly him to Rosario where he can make connections with an Argentine line. He never got there. And that's where you come in, Don."

Don struck his chest with the tips of his fingers.

"*Me!* What the heck I got to do with that?" he asked in bewilderment.

There was despair in Kelson's voice:

"Maybe everything," he said. "Arlen was insured for a million. There was a double indemnity clause which included plane accidents. That makes it two million. For that kind of dough, World-Wide wants to know positively, that Arlen is dead, and how he died. You see, there are some odd circumstances about that flight."

DON had already forgotten about the red-head, though his pose was still that of a thoroughly disgusted man.

"Arlen's plane maintained contact

with the Santiago port for about two hundred miles. All of a sudden there's a distress call, and before it can be clarified, the air is dead. The call said only that they were running into bad weather. But here's the strange thing about the whole deal. At exactly the same time, a regular flight called in on the same beam, flying at the same level, that everything was okay . . ."

"Can't be," Don said, "Not exactly the same time on the same beam . . ."

"So a few minutes more or less. What's the difference. It wasn't enough to make a great deal of an issue. The important thing was that one plane radios foul weather and the other fair. And Arlen's plane simply disappears."

"How about rescue planes and search parties?" Don asked.

"Nothing!" Kelson said with emphasis. "Absolutely nothing. They even used government planes and all available private ones. Not the smallest trace. Look baby. You knew me. I can smell something fishy even across a continent. And somehow the smell of fish in this is making me positively sick. I want you to get out there and find that plane."

Don's mouth fell open. He had nice teeth. Slowly the startled look faded from the brown eyes and was replaced by an injured one.

"Now boss," Don said placatingly. "Have a heart! That's not like sending me to Cicero on a case. Chile is a million miles away. And I got a dame, the most beautiful red-head . . ."

"Let her wait. Besides, weren't you the one who always told me the best way to get a dame is to have her wait around for a guy. Never let them get the jump," Kelson said. "So let her wait. This is more important. And I don't want any stalling. Get on the ball right away."

Don shrugged his shoulders in de-

feat. "You're the boss," he said, "let's have the papers on it."

* * *

KELSON was thorough, Don realised after leafing through the papers. It was all there for him. All except the reason why Kelson thought there was something crooked about it.

He looked through the car window at the broad expanse of well-kept lawn and immaculate and orderly rows of evergreens which was the estate of the late Gilbert Arlen, and knew he was looking at what money can do. The house was a three-story affair of grey-stone, built in the English manor style. A Packard limousine gleamed its opulence from the driveway before the roofed over section where the drive curved in to the house. Don put his cigarette out and put the car into gear and drove in behind the Packard.

A Jap houseboy answered his ring.

Mrs. Arlen was in and wouldn't he wait in the reception room? He would, Don said, and found a tall, straight-backed chair whose carved edge kept hitting him in the nape. There was the rustle of a woman's dress and Don got to his feet just in time. A tall woman, dressed in dark clothes swept into the room.

Don smiled but the measured glance of her cold-looking blue eyes didn't warm to his smile. He knew from the history of Arlen's record that his wife was in her late thirties, that her first name was Naomi, but other than that Don knew nothing of her. Now he saw that she a beautiful woman, although he personally, didn't go for the cold, austere type. She had a narrow, oval face, with accentuated cheekbones; a fine nose, high-bridged, patrician; a good mouth, though thin in the lips; and wonderful hair, gleaming

ebony in color.

SHE waited for him to state his business.

"I'm from World-Wide Coverage," Don began.

She stopped him.

"My houseman informed me of that. Please come to the point."

"There is no point," he continued. "This is just a routine check-up. Just a few things we'd like to have clear and understood."

Again she interrupted:

"I'm sorry," she said. "But you'll have to take that up with my lawyer. If you'll excuse me . . .?"

Don's nostrils quivered in anger. He didn't like brush-offs of any kind, especially from dames with high-bridged noses.

"Certainly," he said bitingly, "you can spare a few moments and it won't take more than . . ."

"I think," a deep, throaty voice broke in, "that I can answer any questions you'd like."

He was of middle-height, with a pear-shaped body, which tapered from narrow shoulders down to a pair of extremely wide hips which looked like they belonged more to the opposite sex. He had a wide face, a triple chin, and balding hair, and his name was J. Comrop Sert, and he was the Arlen attorney.

"Now my dear," he said, patting the woman gently across the shoulders, "I'll take care. Why don't you go up and lie down." Then to Don, "An awful shock. Just terrible! You must excuse her. I'll answer any questions. Though I don't see . . ." the words trailed off.

There was something peculiar about the words Sert used to her. Don realized, though he couldn't say whether they were a warning or what. What

did he mean, 'I'll take care?' Take care of what?

"And now young man," Sert said. "Just what was it you wanted?"

Don was blandness it self, when he said, "We'd like to know why Arlen wanted a million dollar's worth of insurance?"

Sert's eyes were warmly ingatiating, as was his voice as he answered:

"This is a bit late for that, isn't it? Surely your company asked itself that question before issuing the policy. And having asked, must have answered reasonably on all the points involved. Come now, Mister Roseroot, let's not shilly-shally. What is it you want?"

"Just that. The answer, and I mean the real one, why Arlen wanted a million-dollar policy?"

"I'm afraid I can't answer that question in any other way than to have you see the *late* Mister Arlen," Sert said. "Perhaps he'll have a better answer?"

Don spread his hands wide. "So okay," he said. "You can't. Maybe there's some who can?"

Don started to leave but stopped as Sert's throaty voice called to him:

"Roseroot."

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid World-Wide will still have to pay, no matter what you learn."

ONE of the characters at Danny's Joint tried to tout Don on a run-down nag in the fifth at Laurel. But Don wasn't really seeing the Racing Form's handicaps. He held the paper in his hands only as a means of defense against anyone breaking in on his thinking. Danny's was his favorite hide-out when he wanted to be alone with his thoughts. The low hum of voices, the sound of the loud speaker with its mechanical call to bet, and its raucous announcing of the races

seemed to act on his mind as a sort of bulwark.

"Hi, Don," a familiar voice broke into his thoughts.

He looked up and saw it was Harry Lang, a broker's man, the kind who had gone to Yale and had a personal clientele. Lange wore hundred and seventy-five dollar suits, fifteen dollar knitted ties, usually of wool and invariably black in color, and shirts with wide-spread collars. Lang also knew the inside on just about everything that went on in La Salle street.

"So World-Wide's gonna take a kick in the pants?" Lang asked grinning broadly.

"How's that?" Don asked.

"Two million bucks to Arlen's widow, you know. And a mighty lucky lady she is, too."

"You can come again on *that* rice pudding," Don suggested.

Lang took the hint. "He just kicked the bucket in time. Here. Take a gander at this." He pulled a section of the financial sheet from one of the dailies lying on a nearby chair, and shoved it under Don's nose. "Read that!"

Boiled down, the article stated that the *paper* empire Gilber Arlen had built met a strong gust of wind in the form of a whirlpool of buying orders which kicked the skids from under some of the speculative stocks Arlen was backing strongly, and sent them down to where the bottom was several rungs *above* them.

"Naomi Arlen's going to find that kind of dough easy to take," Lang said. "Because I don't think Arlen would have found himself with a pot to cook in after yesterday's selling market."

"Look, Harry," Don said after a quick run-down of the article. "You know something about the guy. What sort of character was he?"

"Sharp. But plenty," Lang replied. "But I think he went overboard too much on those nitrate shares. Especially when the U. N. Council permitted German manufacturers to return to the making of synthetics. And when it came to nitrate substitutes, the Chilean product was prohibitive in price. Arlen backed the wrong horse on that. Further, he went the whole way in his gamble. I heard he sank three millions into it. Of course had the Council decided otherwise, he'd have cleaned up. But what the hell, the guy's laying out there in the Andes. I'm sure he doesn't give a damn about anything now."

"What do you mean?"

Lang's grin went away, when he saw the look on Don's face.

"Didn't you know they found the plane?" Lang asked.

The blank look remained and Lang went on; "Sure. There was a couple of lines in this morning's papers about it. They spotted the wreckage from the air. And from the looks of it they can't see how either the pilot or Arlen managed to escape. Of course the plane wasn't in an accesible place but I gather, from the report, that there's no doubt about Arlen's death."

Don nodded his head as though in agreement with Lang's words, but his thoughts were, Looks like Kelson's case is washed. No way of proving his death now. And obviously, If Kelson thought of the suicide angle, he'll never be able to prove it now. Still . . .

Aloud, he said, "Well, thanks, Long. You gave me all I wanted to know. Oh, yes," as though in afterthought. "What do you know about this Sert character who is the Arlen attorney?"

"A mighty shrewd boy," Lang said. "Too shrewd, some say. But he's gotten away with whatever shady deals he's planned. So nobody can pin any-

thing on him."

"That's the way I figured him," Don said, rising and stretching. "Well, I'm back to the office. So long, Harry."

KELSON had the look of a man who swallowed a whole bottle of paregoric because some one had told him it would cure all his ailments, and found that he still was sick, but from the paregoric.

"Look, Don," he said, pointing to his nose. "This thing has never failed me. It can smell a wrong deal a mile off."

"It's big enough," Don said.

Kelson passed over the remark. "Okay. You've been two day on it. What do you think now?"

"I think the old schnozz is still doing good. Only how do we prove it?"

"Three angles," Kelson said. "First; it's on the level. Second; it was suicide. Third; it was murder.

"We got the whole report in this morning. Arlen hired a private plane and pilot. They flew regular course. The plane was an old army job, a two-seater which could fly high enough, and there was nothing shady about the deal. The spotter saw the wreckage in a place they describe as inaccessible. The plane had burned; they saw a whole area burned away, and the plane was literally torn to bits. No chance of anyone who might have been *in* the plane, surviving."

Don got the accent on the word, 'in,' and knew what Kelson meant.

"You figure they jumped, is that it?"

"I don't know. Because as far as I can figure, even if they did, what did they stand to gain? The Andes, where they were wrecked, is a jumble of, well, hell."

"Y'know," Don said reflectively. "I felt only so-so about this investigation when I started on it. Now I'm interested. And I think that maybe not all

is Kosher in Chile. So . . ."

"Yeah? So what?" Kelson demanded.

"So I'd like to go out there and look around."

"Okay! I'll put in a hold report on payment of claim. Sert will probably take us to court on it. But that will take at least a month, what with delays; by that time you'll have your report for me. Right?"

"Right. Get me plane reservations for Chile. I'll call the office later. Got some things to do first. 'Bye."

Kelson watched Don leave. He massaged his moustache with his lower lip, and his fingers played with some papers on his desk. A strange guy, Don Rose-root, Kelson thought. Big, affable, to-hell-with-tomorrow, character. Plenty of head and guts. Should have his own agency instead of working twenty-four hours a day for World-Wide. Yet despite the crap of this job, Don seemed to like it for some strange reason. Maybe, Kelson sighed aloud, it was because insurance investigation was like a disease of the blood. One just couldn't get rid of it. Like himself, for instance; twenty years of it. Ulcers and a suspicious mind was all he had to show. Still . . .

THE phone rang and he answered. It was a call on an industrial claim that didn't jibe with the reports of the accident. His voice snarled over the wire.

The door had no sooner closed on Don when he felt the urge to kick himself. Always it had been like that. Against his better judgment, too. The case was obviously closed. Why ask for trouble? And it would be just his luck that the plane crash was accidental. Now why did it have to happen just when he found a babe like Mari-Jane? Mari-Jane! Holy smokes! She was terrific.

He'd left her at the Goldster Inn. She couldn't still be there. That was two days ago. Of course a girl like Mari-Jane . . .

To hell with her, he glumly announced, and didn't realize he had spoken aloud until a passing stranger looked queerly at him. He headed north, walking; his hotel was on the near north side, but on passing one of the air agencies, he decided to inquire about something.

And the first person he saw was Sert, the Arlen lawyer. Sert's back was to him, as he stood at the long counter. A clerk was waiting on him. There was a waiting room on a balcony above the main floor. One of the stairs leading to it was on the right of the entrance. Don went up the stairs, one eye on Sert, watching to see if he'd turn. Don was in luck. Sert was too engrossed in his talk. Don stationed himself in such a way that he could see without being seen.

In a few minutes Sert was through. The clerk handed him an envelope, evidently containing plane tickets, and smiled politely in parting. Don barely waited until Sert left, and he was down the stairs and facing the same clerk.

"That man you just waited on, what did he want?" Don demanded.

"I beg your pardon," the clerk said. But though his tone was polite, there was the hint of truculence in his eyes.

Don flashed his badge. It did the trick. Somehow, people never showed any inclination to investigate that badge.

"He just bought a ticket for Santiago, Chile," the clerk said.

"For when?" Don asked.

Flight twenty one. Leaves Chicago midnight of the twenty-ninth . . ."

"That's the day after tomorrow, right?"

"Yes."

"Can I use the phone?"

"Go right ahead."

Kelson was still in. Dave gave him the news about Sert in a few terse sentences. Kelson asked what he wanted to do, and Don told him he wanted tickets on the same flight. Kelson talked to the clerk and after a delay while the clerk called the manager and had the call verified, Don walked out with a through ticket which told him he was the possessor of seat number, nine, on flight twenty one.

All thoughts of going to his hotel vanished for Don. He went to get back to the office and get Kelson to okay something he wanted.

Kelson was skeptical.

"But why do you want a man on Sert's tail. Holy cats, Don! That'll run into dough."

"But a hell of a lot less than two million," Don reminded him.

"Sure. But what's the angle?"

"Look. I'm going to leave tonight on another flight and with another company. I'll beat Sert to Santiago by two days. It should be enough to get me the information I want. You've got three hours in which to get me reservations, type out the data I'll need, and all the other little things I'm going to need, especially money. So don't ask questions, but get right on the ball. I'm going home and pack. Keep smiling, lunkhead."

And Kelson managed, somehow, to do just what Don wanted.

DON'S seatmate was an engineer, going to Chile on a job. It wasn't his first trip to the country, and he proved to be a valuable source of information.

"Tough flying over the Andes, isn't it?" Don asked.

"Toughest flying in the world," Jenkins said. "My boy flew the Hump in the last fracas, and before that he

had a South American run for Pan-American. The Andes are worse, he says."

"How far," Don wanted to know, "is it from Santiago to Rosario, in Argentina?"

Jenkins said, "Somewhere around seven hundred miles. Why? Got some business there?"

"Uh huh. I left in such a hurry that I didn't bother looking up accommodations."

"Well, I don't know conditions today. Though I believe that there is a connecting airline between Argentina and Chile which runs on some sort of chartered schedule. The stewardess would know, I imagine. What line are you in, ir?"

"Insurance," Don said. He introduced himself as a representative of his company who was going down on a routine check-up of the Chilean branch of his company.

Jenkins sighed and let out a belch of cigar smoke.

"Wonderful country," he said. "Especially Santiago. It'll remind you of California. And it's the only city in all South America where English is a common tongue. They've got a large English colony up there, and any number of bars where you can order drinks and the bartender will understand what you're talking about. And the girls!" he smacked his lips.

"Nice?" he asked.

"Beautiful. Blondes, brunettes and red-heads. All varieties."

"Now that's interesting," Don commented. It was, too. He hated the dull routine of investigation. And there was nothing like a woman to make the time pass.

* * *

Santiago was set in the foothills of

the Andes. The cabbie understood English and drove him to the hotel Jenkins had advised. The clerk was solicitous, the help were helpful, the water was hot and the beginning of his visit was auspicious for its smoothness. Don got out of the shower, dried himself in the immense Turkish towel the management supplied for their guests, and relaxed on the very deeply upholstered chaise-lounge.

He reached into his brief case and pulled out the data Kelson had provided.

The name of the company Arlen had been interested in was the Nitrates, Limited. Their headquarters was in Santiago. Don dressed himself with a care, for a change, and sauntered down to the lobby. The clerk gave him the information he wanted; Nitrates, Limited, was in the heart of the city's financial district, a five-minute taxi ride.

The offices were located in a very modern, white limestone building, whose architecture would not have been amiss in any American city. And the offices, themselves, were as elaborate and ornate and efficient with help as any Don had ever seen. The girl at the information desk parked her gum as neatly and efficiently as the information girl in his own offices in Chicago would have done.

Could he see someone in charge? . . . He could, and what was his name and business? . . . Insurance? But she was so sorry . . . Oh! About Mr. Arlen. Would he have a seat while she connected the man he would have to see? . . . He would.

The man's name was Carlos Ramon Garvey. He was the oddest-looking Latin-American Don had even seen.

Garvey was tall, red-haired, and spoke with a definitely Broadway idiom.

"Come in here, Jack," he said, motioning toward his office.

Don made himself comfortable and accepted with grateful pleasure the Scotch and water Garvey offered. Garvey sat beside him on the leather couch which seemed to be an integral part of the office.

"ARLEN'S name's an open sesame around here," Garvey said. "But I'm a little at sea about this *insurance* thing. What's the pitch?"

Don explained that it was a usual procedure, when there was a question about a man's death, to send someone down to make a spot investigation.

"Why?" Garvey asked. "Do you think there was something fishy? Something that was not quite, shall we say, legal?"

"I don't know," Don said. "That's why I'm here, to find out."

"I think you're barking up the wrong tree," Garvey said. "Let me set you right. Arlen had a deal in Buenos Aires; it had to do with Argentine oil, and he wanted to get there fast. So he contacts a man we sometimes use. The jerky tells him he'll fly him: sure he will; Arlen gave him five yards for the flight. I saw him off at the port, myself. Of course when they didn't arrive in Rosario, I got worried. Arlen'd told me that he'd wire the moment they arrived. But it's normally a seven hour trip, and he left around nine, so he should have gotten there at the latest, five. Of course I began to worry when no news of him showed up.

I wired the people he was supposed to contact. Nothing on that end. I immediately got in touch with the governments of both countries. Search planes were sent out. It took three days to find the wreckage. And it was in such a place no one could have possibly got to it."

"Uh huh. Tell me. How was Arlen, I mean did he act worried, skow

signs of anything that might have led you to suspect not all was well with him?" Don asked.

"Look, Jack," Garvey demanded. "What are you trying to give me? Arlen was as sharp as a tack. Nothing wrong with that guy. Just what alley are you trying to lead me into?"

Don wondered why Garvey was so concerned. Surely that sharp tone wasn't one of ordinary interest. Unless he had something to do with it? But why? How?

"I wonder if you can help me a bit?" Don asked in mild tones. "Whom do I see about the men who spotted the wreckage?"

"You'd have to see Colonel Rios down at the airport. But I've got a better idea. Rios is a friend of mine. Why not let me contact him and bring him and the men who found the wreckage, over to your place?"

Don thought it was a swell idea, and gave Garvey his hotel. Garvey said he and the others would be up sometime in the evening, but that he would call before he came.

". . . About nine," Garvey said, as Don opened the door.

The red-headed man looked at the closed door with a blank expression for a few minutes after Don left. Then he reached for the phone with his left hand. His right reached into the box of panetellas on the table alongside the sofa. He asked for an outside number and listened to the shrill sound of a bell's clamoring summons. His teeth clamped down hard on the thin cigar as the phone kept ringing. She should be in at this hour of the afternoon!

There was a click at the other end of the wire and a low, husky voice answered, "Hel-lo?"

"Maria?" Garvey asked.

"Yes. Carlos, no?"

"Right, my pretty. Are you alone?"

"But of course. How else does my Carlos want me? How are you, darling?"

"I don't know yet. Maybe you can tell me. But now that we are done with the small talk, I have a job for you. For tonight."

"So! A job for me," her voice hadn't lost its sultry quality but now there was a new note in it. "I like that, Carlos. Only not for the chicken-feed, please. Maria has champagne tastes, understand."

He could almost hear the tapping foot. In his mind's eyes was a picture of her apartment, and the wide bed on which he was sure she was stretched out, and the smell of her and the . . . His mind returned to the business at hand.

"No, baby, no *vino* on this trip. This is for real dough. And in advance. Come on down . . . No! Better not. I'll see you at the 'Pigeon,' in half-hour, right?"

Her murmured, "yes," put a wide grin on his mouth.

THE sign was in English. It stated that there was a tap room past its neon glow. Don was reminded that he hadn't had any refreshments in the past two days, other than coffee. He sauntered into the tap, a tall man in brown Shetlands, whose easy manner and wide shoulders, and broad grin made many a man and woman give him a second glance. Especially Maria Cordoba.

Don found a vacant stool midway on the wide horseshoe of the bar. The bartender found his favorite brand of Scotch, and the clock behind the bar told him he had the best part of three hours to spend at something before the meeting with Colonel Rios and the others.

Two and a half hours had gone by since he'd left Garvey. The airport

had been surprisingly close. And the two men he had seen had been surprisingly informative. In a way he no longer needed Rios. Or Garvey, for that matter. Still, he wanted to hear their story.

He smelled the subtle perfume before he saw her, and saw her in the mirror behind the bar before he turned. There was only one ford for her, gorgeous.

She was wearing a light-weight gabardine suit, grey in color and mannish in style. Her hair, midnight-blue, was piled in a tight roll on top of her head. She had a wide, oval face and slanted eyes which touched a spark of heat in his breast when their eyes met. She smiled with a lifted corner of her mouth.

"Drink?" he asked in Spanish.

She answered in English, "Thank you, yes."

She ordered a Stinger and said her name was Maria Cordobo and what was she doing here? Wasn't it the cocktail hour . . . It was . . . and wasn't she having cocktails? . . . she was. Then all was as it should be.

Many a woman had found Don's lop-sided grin attractive. Maria seemed to find it amusing enough, but not more so than any ordinary grin. She finished her second Stinger and started to get off the stool. He put his fingers on her arm.

"What's the hurry?" he asked.

"It's the cocktail hour," she said. "I don't live here."

"So let's go to your place," he said, but the smile he gave her took the implication of something else from his voice.

"I was told about men like you," she said.

"And . . .?"

"Nothing. I was just told about men like you."

"Well, tell me," he urged. "What did they say about men like me?"

"Oh," he eyes left his face and looked beyond him. "They're always tall, easy-mannered, casual with their women, like to drink and are always adventurers of sorts. Like yourself, for example."

"Like myself? How do you figure me as an adventurer?"

She smiled, showing teeth of immaculate whiteness and he felt a thrill at the sight of them. Her smile made her even more beautiful.

"Really," she said. "I can't put my finger on anything definite. It's like seeing a bottle of perfume and imagining its scent. This bar is the package, you're the perfume."

"It isn't as hard as you'd imagine it to be. You're an American, for one thing. This hotel is well-known for its clientele from across the border. And why do Americans come here? For only one of several reasons. Nitrates, oil, or sports. But whatever the reason, adventure lies at the core. Now what is your reason for being here?"

DON shook his head in amazement. This woman was not only beautiful, she was positively . . .

"I'd say," he said, "that I'm not the only man you've met, whom you've been told about. Now let's see how good I am at playing this game."

"Of course you're a Chilean. Though I'm of the opinion that you're part English or have had an English governess. You've come here alone which means you're not married, which can mean one of several things. You might like to drink, or you might want a pick-up, or you're on your way to someplace and decided to stop in and have a drink."

"But the fact is you allowed a perfect stranger to buy you a drink which is not the usual custom among women

of South America. Therefore you, yourself are an *adventuress*. Having arrived at that conclusion, I'd like to know the reason why you picked me up?"

"Maybe I liked your grin," she said.

Don looked away from her to the clock on the wall. He still had an hour and a half before the meeting.

"Look," he said. "I'm going to be here for several days.. I have to see some people, shortly. But before I go, I'd like to know I'm going to see you again. Will I?"

She gave him a direct stare. Her eyes were sloe-black with an odd brightness, as though the iris' held some inner means of illumination.

"I usually stop here at this hour. I may be here tommorrow night. Thanks for the drinks for the drinks; it *has* been nice knowing you, so until *mama-na.....*"

He smacked his lips aloud as he watched her pass through the door which led to the lobby of the hotel. Finishing his drink, he tipped the bartender a dollar and followed her.

COLONEL Rios was a short, barrel-chested man in a gaudy uniform. There were two others with him, also in uniform, and obviously of much lower rank, though officers too, from their manner. Rios acknowledged the introduction by grunting through his bristling black moustache.

"Colonel Rios," Garvey said in explanation, and speaking in English, "is the commanding officer at the field, as I explained . . ."

"You can speak in Spanish," Don said. "I understand your language."

"Wonderful!" Garvey exclaimed. "It will make it so much easier. I gave my friend, the colonel, a rough idea of what you were after. Now you can tell him in greater detail."

"Well, quite simply, it's this," Don said, speaking directly to Rios. "Is it possible for a man to have survived the crash?"

"Who can tell?" Rios said, shrugging his wide shoulders. "I have brought along Teniente Solarte. He and another found the plane. Teniente, tell the Senor Roseroot the exact circumstances of your discovery."

Solarte bowed in Don's direction and began:

"From the despatcher's report we knew Haviland . . ."

"Haviland?" Don broke in. "Was the pilot of Arlen's plane an American or Englishman?"

"English," Garvey said.

"Sorry, Teniente," Don said. "Go on."

"HAVILAND flew the prescribed course across the pass of El Diablo in order to avoid the higher ranges to the south. He flew at something under eighteen thousand feet. Only the commercial liners fly higher," he said by way of explanation. And went on, "We know he was all right just before he arrived at the pass. Then he radioed he was in trouble. But he never . . ."

Once more Don interrupted:

"If you don't mind, Teniente, I'd rather you got directly to the discovery of the plane; where it was located and how you arrived at the conclusion it was the plane you were searching for."

"Very well, sir," the young officer said, his face a fiery red, as though in anger at the constant stopping of his report. "We knew it was the plane in question because we saw the identifying marks. It was only through the greatest fortune that we even caught sight of it. We were flying over a valley, or rather a chasm between two peaks. From out of nowhere, although

it is quite common in this part of the Andes, a blinding snowstorm came up. We could see nothing. I took a last hopeless look through my binoculars and at that instant, and as if by magic, the curtain of snow and mist lifted, and I saw on the side of the highest peak below, the fragments of the plane we were searching for. As though it had been placed there for the express purpose of identification, the tail assembly with its identifying numbers lay face up. I could read the numbers quite plainly."

It was a thrilling recital. Don almost picture the craft with its two men, battling the elements, could almost feel the wild uncontrollable grip of the storm lifting the plane hundreds of feet, then dropping it with a suddenness which took the breath away. It was as if he was beside Haviland, and shared with him the battle of the controls. He knew the last second of despair they must have felt when the battle was lost and the plane took its last wild downswing to crash at last against the wild mountain peak.

"So that's it," he murmured in a low voice.

The four men looked to Don as if expecting more than the low words he gave voice to. Instead, Don turned and walked to one of the wide windows and looked down on the darkened street. Garvey shot Rios and his fellow officers a quick glance, and after a few seconds, Rios murmured an excuse and left with his men.

Garvey cleared his throat and Don turned to face him, at the sound.

"What now, Roseroot?" Garvey asked.

"Guess there isn't much for me to do," Don said. "I'll have to charter a plane and fly out to where the wreckage is and look for myself. After that it'll be a matter of report and get back

to Chicago."

Garvey shook his head in admiration.

"I've got to hand the Oscar to you insurance guys. After hearing what sort of place El Diablo pass is, you still want to go out there and look for yourself."

"It isn't me," Don said. "Company rules. Well, thanks for what you've done. It was a hell of a nice gesture."

"Look," Garvey said reflectively. "Since you're going to follow the whole thing to its end, let me give you a little help. I know most of the boys down at the airport. In fact I fly a bit myself. Let me contact someone for you. What say?"

"It's all right with me," Don said.

"Good. I'll give you a ring. Probably tomorrow."

"Right. I'll be waiting. So long."

DON wore a dark business suit. He hadn't thought to pack evening clothes. Maria, as if knowing he would be dressed as he was, wore dark informal clothes. He arrived at the bar first. But she didn't keep him waiting long. He thought he detected a welcoming and warming sparkle in her eyes.

"Y'know," he said, by way of opening, "I sort of had a sneaking suspicion you wouldn't show up."

"And why not? Are the women you know the kind who disappoint you?"

"I don't know yet . . . about this woman," he said with intent.

"About me? Why? Did you have certain ideas about me?"

"I never have ideas about any woman," he said. "Especially when they're beautiful and are met in cocktail lounges. Which brings something to mind. We're not going to spend the evening here, I hope."

"No, we're not. As a, shall we say, welcoming member of Chilean womanhood. I think it's only my duty to show

you Santiago, at its best."

"Meaning?"

"Exactly what I said. Shall we leave this dismal place now?"

"Suits me. Lead on, gorgeous."

Her idea of showing Santiago at its best, was a round of the nightclubs. They were interesting enough, but very little different from those in the states. The music ran more to the slumberous Latin-American rhythms, and the people were not so intent on getting drunk. They were also not as elaborate.

Maria drank a succession of Stingers which seemed to act with opposite effect, for she seemed to become more sober with each drink.

They were watching a pair of adagio dancers in a place called 'The Cowboy,' when Maria noticed the look of boredom in his eyes. Here took on a wary look. She tried to gauge how much more whiskey would make him drunk to the point where he would be easy to deal with.

He wasn't quite at that stage, she thought quickly. But it wouldn't take long, now. One more spot, and that the one which was her goal, should do it.

"Bored, Don?" she asked. They had passed the stage where they used the more formal address.

"Well . . . No," he sounded gallant. "Not while I'm with you, gorgeous."

"That's what I thought," she said. "And you're too much of a gentleman to say you are."

He grinned cheerfully and gestured for the waiter. She laid her fingers on his arm.

"Ask for the check," she said. "I should have known better than to bring you to places like these. There are enough, and more of them back where you come from. We'll go to a place

which is not the sort usually shown to visiting firemen."

He gave her a quick look from the side of his eyes. Where did she pick up words like, 'firemen?' There had been several other times when she used like expressions, expressions were ordinary in the large cities of the U. S. but which sounded strange from her lips. Yet she had told him she had never been out of Chile. He was reminded of Garvey and his way of talking. And for some strange reason, the two were associated.

Don was still surprised, though this was the fifth spot they had hit, when he got the check. The whole thing amounted to a few dollars, American money. He left the change for the waiter who almost kissed him in gratitude.

SHE sat quite close to him in the cab.

He smelled again the subtle aroma of her perfume, and felt the softness of her flesh next to his. His arm went around her shoulders, and slipped a little lower as she let them stay. They passed a street light and he saw her face turned to his.

He kissed her and felt the warm mouth stir in sensuous pleasure in deep response. A bright wave of heat rose in his breast. He held her closer, pressed his lips harder, and felt hers withdraw.

"No. Not now," she said, as if in promise. "Making love in cabs is like, well, the young swain and the maid on her night off, who find even the park sufficient."

Don breathed deeply and relaxed against the seat. This Maria Cordoba was a high-flying gal, and a lot of fun. Maybe the evening wouldn't be wasted.

Don looked around him as the cab pulled up before a forlorn-looking place, that would have passed for a

stable at any time. The neighborhood, too, wasn't either the cleanest or most prepossessing he'd ever seen. As a matter-of-fact, it looked like the skim off Santiago's slum. Ramshackle buildings, cobbled, narrow streets, with no light standards, made it drearier and a bit on the depressing side.

They had stopped before the stable-saloon, for that was what is proved to be. The stalls had been removed, but the straw and smell remained. Candles were the only means of illumination. The waiters were not dressed in the usual ill-fitting dinner jackets, waiters affected. Nor were the customers like those they'd seen in the other spots. They were people of the neighborhood, working men with their wives, although there were only a couple of these seated at the bare, wooden tables. For the most part, though altogether there were only twenty-some odd people in the place, they were single men and women.

Maria looked about in casual dis-interest, or so it seemed. But the bright, sloe-eyes held a thinly-veiled glow of intense speculation. They became more veiled, more dis-interested, when she caught sight of several men seated at three tables in various parts of the room.

GOOD! she thought. So Sanchez was able to get away; and the thick-headed Dutchman, Carl, and Morenos and the others, they were all there. Well, there were enough of them to take care of the American.

One of the waiters, who looked more like one of the peasant workmen than anything else, approached their table.

He gave them a bored, opaque look, and said:

"What'll it be?"

Maria recommended a local brandy, which, she said, was made in a distinctive way out of grapes grown in the

vicinity. She was proved right when their drinks arrived. They had another round. And as they sipped the drinks, Don began to wonder what the attraction was about the place that she dragged him off to it.

"Patience," she said, when he questioned her. "It is a little early. But soon you will know why."

And on the very heels of her words, came a foursome of musicians, a fiddler, an accordeonist, a trumpet, and a bull fiddle. They found a corner in which one of the workmen-waiters pulled up a table, and arranged themselves and began to play.

"Watch," Maria said.

One by one the couples who had been seated at the tables got up and began to dance to the slow-tempoed music. Several of the men who were at the French-type zinc bar found partners among the girls, who for the most part were alone at the small tables.

The music did not rise and fall, as was common in other dance tempos. It seemed to persist at an odd, low level. Yet there was a strange cadence to it, a queer, compelling demand to dance to it. The couples shuffled about the wooden floor, as though they were in a trance. Yet it was more than just a trance, Don realized after a few minutes of watching. It was like a ritual they were performing, a dance of love Don had never seen performed before.

He became aware that there was an odd throbbing to his temples, a strange quickening of his blood as he watched, and he became aware, also, that his throat was thick and tight, as when passion ran strong in him. He threw a quick look at Maria and saw her nostrils dilate and relax strongly.

"Wha—" he began, and cleared his throat harshly of the phlegm which seemed to have collected. "What kind of dance is it?"

Her voice was low, and dream-like in quality when she answered:

"There is no name for it. Just watch it, Jackson. This ex-stable has been used for this for a hundred years. And the fathers and mothers of these same people have been doing the same dance through the years.

"They're descendants of the peasants and Indians who lived here long ago. Their fathers and mothers danced so in the long-ago. But don't talk. Watch."

If anything, the music became dream-like in its quality, and the men and women on the floor were like somnambulists. Don found his head swaying in almost mesmeric time to the music. He didn't realize the music had stopped until the couples separated and went back to their former places.

"That," he said slowly, "was wonderful. I've never seen anything like it. And I've seen the native-quarter dances in Martinique, where the boys and gals strut like they're having a date with an orgasm."

She smiled slowly, her eyes dreamily looking deeply into his.

THE waiter came around and they ordered another round of the potent wonderful brandy. Don suddenly realized that the accumulated whiskeys, cocktails and brandy were making him drunk.

Watch it, Jackson, he thought. And suddenly a word stuck out, like a red flag of warning, in his mind. *Jackson!* Who was it that liked to use the word? He groped through the shroud of whiskey-fog in his mind. *Jackson!* His lips fell slack as the answer came to him.

Garvey! The Chilean friend and business acquaintance of Arlen.

She did not, could not guess the sudden gleam of newly awakened interest in his eyes. He tried to probe the

depths of her eyes. How closely were they connected, these two, Garvey and the girl? He thought back to their meeting. How casual it seemed? An ordinary pick-up at a bar, it seemed to be. Or was it? Had she been sent there by Garvey? And if she were why?

The violin and accordeon started a new tune.

And once again the same couples joined up. The other instruments joined in. This time it was new tempo, a little stronger, a little wilder. The people on the floor acted with more animation. They danced closed, swayed toward each other, relaxed and parted. And once more Don became lost in the dancers and the music.

"Would the lady dance?" a voice asked.

Don thought it was his imagination. He turned from watching the people on the floor and saw a man at Maria's side, his head bent in her direction. Only the side of a jaw, long and bristling with a fine, dark beard, and the thin, hair-line of a moustache could be seen in the dim light.

Maria frowned and looked quickly toward Don.

Once more the question, this time directed to Don.

Don caught the negative of Maria's head, as he looked up to answer.

"Sorry," Don said, speaking in Spanish, the language the other had used. "I think the lady is tired."

The other looked to Don directly. He was tall, Don saw, angular in his thinness, the face drawn and lined, the eyes circled by deep, dark shadows, and somehow mean-looking.

"Tired?" the stranger asked. "From what, boozing?"

"Look!" Don said edgily. "You asked for a dance. The lady said she was tired. Why don't you let it go at

that?"

The other stood and smiled down at Don, crookedly. Don became aware of others' eyes and attention.

"Since you like issues," the other said easily, "I think it is a shame a *puta* as pretty as she should sit as though alone, with a fool who does not or cannot dance."

Don felt the coldness which always preceeded the wild burst of anger, come to birth in his chest. He could feel the blood leave his face, felt again the familiar stiffness of muscles, and waited a few seconds for them to relax. He knew what was going to happen. The other was not going to let up until words led to blows. Don didn't have to be told that the man had a knife somewhere about him.

"Why don't you be a nice egg and scam out of here?" Don asked.

FOR an instant Maria forgot her pose of dis-interest. Her teeth were suddenly bared and her eyes had lambent flames twithin ther depths

Suddenly, the room held a stillness. Don kept his eyes focused on the face of the man in front of him. But he could feel, as though it were a physical force, the glances of the others in the room.

"My friend," the other said, "those are not words to be used lightly unless. . . ?"

"Yeah?" Don' voice matched the other's in its toneless quality. Only the one who was standing did not notice the surreptitious movement of Don's feet under the table, shifting to obtain the leverage he might need if the fight began of a sudden. "So?" Don asked.

The other shrugged his shoulders, started to turn away, and almost as quickly turned toward Don and moved in toward his side of the table. Only he wasn't quite fast enough.

For Don felt the other's intent.

And as the man stepped forward, his right hand behind him reaching for the knife in his belt, Don shot erect, his hands pushing hard at the table, not caring whether Maria was struck or not. The stranger caught the table's edge squarely in the middle, staggering him backward. It was enough for Don. His hand wrapped itself around the bottle of brandy the waiter had left, and he swung it as though it were a tennis racket. It made a satisfying sound as it caught the other across the side of the head. He went down and the bottle broke close to the bottom.

As though the stranger's move was a signal, four others leaped from their tables and converged on Don. He tried to grab Maria's arm, but she eluded him and skipped to safety.

Don shoved the table aside, his eyes seeking an avenue of escape. Four were too many. And he had seen the knives in their hands. But there was no escape. For two of them had leaped for the door, the only means of escape, unless there were windows, Don could find.

Don didn't hesitate. He ran straight for the two at the door. One was a tall, heavy-set man with tow-colored hair, and a square face. The other was tiny, rat-like in his bearing, his body hunched low, the knife hand held down and the fingers carressing the blade almost at the tip. The tall one held nothing in his hand but they were stretched out in front of him as though they were waiting to wrap themselves around Don.

Don seemed to run straight for the larger man, then, at the last second changed directions and lunged for the little man. He held the broken bottle straight out before him, a tubed-lance with serrated edges. The little rat-like creature drew back in alarm from the broken bottle, the knife in his hand for-

gotten in the sudden fear. The little man fell back. But the big guy jumped forward.

He had no fear of the bottle. His arms went around Don like a mother's go around her infant, and almost with the same loving care. Don waited until the thick arms enveloped him. *Then* he acted. His right knee came up with the force of a trip-hammer, and none too quickly. The arms had him in their embrace for the smallest interval of time. Yet in that second or so, Don felt as though he had been encompassed by a bone-crusher.

There was the sound of breath exhaling sharply, and the arms relaxed their inexorable pressure. The man fell back. And Don kneed him again. This time there was more than the sound of breath being expelled. The other fell back, groaning deeply in pain. But Don didn't wait for him to recover. His mind was already on the little man. Whirling in a sinuous movement, he struck with the bottle. It didn't seem possible for the little man to duck the blow, yet he did, falling backward and screeching in terror.

Don pressed his advantage; the other was almost in the doorway, and heard the sound of footsteps behind him. Once more he had to move fast. He whirled, saw a half dozen men almost on him, hurled the bottle at the nearest, and turned and grabbed the little man by the shoulders, spun him away from the door.

It was the only mistake Don made.

He felt a burning sensation in his side and pivoted sharply. The little one had stabbed him as he spun away. Don's right hand seemed to flick out with deliberation, but when the clenched fist hit the other it sent him literally flying through the air. A bottle came out of nowhere and struck the door, shattering and sending a torrent

of wine over Don's clothes. Another hit and splattered it glass and liquid over Don. The third struck him a glancing blow on the temple. His hand fell on the knob but the fingers were lax and slid off. Another bottle struck him, but this one was wielded rather than thrown. A rising tide of darkness threw a curtain before Don's eyes. The finishing blow felt like it had been cushioned in cotton. But the darkness was complete now.

He didn't hear Maria say, "Quickly! Get him out of here."

THE car bumped and swayed as it rode over the cobbled streets. The driver cursed and voiced imprecations against the city fathers of Santiago for not improving the conditions of their thoroughfares. But the three other men in the car were silent. Now and then one of them muttered something. The man alongside the driver seemed to be the leader.

"Stop complaining, Rota," he said, after one of them had mentioned the police. "There's more money in this job than you've ever gotten from one of those drunks you roll."

"Yeah," Rota said. "So I pay off the cop and everything is as it was before. This job . . . Well, the money is all right. But the risk. It is to be thought of."

"So you should have thought of it before. Carl!"

"Yes?" a guttural voice said in Spanish.

"How is our friend?"

"He is sleeping like a baby. I can hardly wait until he wakes."

The others laughed. The driver said, "Why? Want to put him back to sleep again?"

"I want to make his head as sore as my belly is," Carl said. "He kicks pretty good, my friend does. I wonder

how well he'll kick when he's down?"

Nobody seemed to be paying the slightest bit of attention to what looked like a bundle of clothing lying between the front and back seats.

"How much further, Rota?" the leader asked.

"Ten more miles. See. There's the farm of old Manuelo. The plane waits only a few miles beyond. But these damned roads! It's like driving a wagon trail."

The fourth member of the party, the one who had been silent longest, suddenly spoke up:

"That Maria," he smacked his lips. "What a dish. Here's one man who'd like to have her set my wine up every night. And later . . ." he smacked his lips again.

The others laughed.

"Well, Sanchez," the driver asked. "Is she as they say?"

"Never mind her," Sanchez said. "We've got more important things to do."

"More important things than a woman? Has Sanchez gone crazy? But perhaps he is tired of her?"

"The only thing I'm tired of," Sanchez said, "is the sound of your voice. How's our friend doing?"

"Okay," Carl said. "It was a good whack you gave him, Sanchez."

"Only payment for the one he gave me," the leader said.

Carlos, the fourth member laughed aloud. "I have to laugh," he said, "when I think of Rota's face when the American came at him with the broken bottle."

"It didn't look like a toy," Rota said sourly. "I tell you a broken bottle is worse than a knife. I know a man . . ."

"Aah!" Carl broke in. "Like hens cackling. That's all. Hens! What difference does it make? He's here at my feet, the brave one. Enough of this

talk. And can't you drive this hearse faster, Rota, you skinny weasel?"

"Shut up, Dutchie," Rota snarled. "Since when are you giving orders around here?"

"If you don't like it," Carl said in heavy accents, which like the thunder clouds, portended a storm, "you know what to do about it."

Sanchez gave the quick-tempered Rota a fast look and saw the man's lips tighten and grow pale in anger. Another moment and there would be a fight. There was no time for that. Besides, it was never good for men of the same clique to battle. There was bad blood between Carl and the other.

"Suppose we save that for a while . . ." Sanchez started to say, and Rota interrupted . . . "Anytime. Now or later." . . . "After this deal jells," Sanchez finished, "then you can do what you want."

"Then for the love of Heaven, let's get there," Carlos put in his voice.

Rota, face set to the rutted path in front of him, spotted a sign.

"Another few minutes," he announced. "It isn't more than a mile and a half away."

DON stirred and felt his stomach heave in anguish. A terrific pain shot through him, from the base of the head until it seemed to come out of his eyes. He clenched his teeth to stop the moan of pain which was trying to force its way past his teeth. As from a distance, he heard the sounds of voices. Then the pain-fog cleared and he knew where he was and could guess who was with him.

He knew he was in a car. They weren't driving over city streets from the jouncing the car was taking. Therefore they were in the country and off the beaten track. His wrists burned and when he moved his hands he could

feel the bonds of rope which bound them. His legs were not tied, however. He speculated idly where their goal lay. He wasn't the sort to have vague fears or speculate idly. Soon enough, he reasoned, the car would stop and he would know where he was and what they intended doing to him.

He knew the man to his left was the tow-headed one. Don's face was pressed downward and he could only identify people by the sounds of their voices. He had heard only Sanchez and Carl talk. The others were only figures.

Sanchez, was in the front seat, he knew, when he heard him address the driver:

"There! That house behind the hedge."

The car swung in a wide arc as it came off the rutted path and began a slow more bouncing ride across what must have been a field. A few minutes of this ride and the car stopped. Don felt hands tug at him, heard the sounds of a door's opening and felt himself lifted and heaved to the ground. He had no chance to brace himself and he hit the ground like a bag of cement. It almost knocked the breath completely from him.

"Lift the pig up," Sanchez commanded. "And carry him into the house."

"Maybe we ought to drag him on the ground like as if he was pig?" Carl asked.

The others thought that was quite an idea.

One of the men flashed a light on Don's face and they saw him blink in the sudden light.

"So he's awake," Sanchez said. "Stand him up."

Carl heaved him erect and Sanchez faced him.

"Get that damned light out of my eyes!" Dan snarled.

Sanchez shook his head in mock ad-

miration.

"Plenty tough, this baby, eh?"

Don turned his head to get it out of the flashlight's direct rays, and found himself facing the scrawny, rat-like man who had wielded the knife on him.

"I know you, you *bastard!*" Don said in low, even tones. "You're the one who used the knife on me."

Rota grinned up at Don, sucked his breath in noisily, and spat full in Don's face. The spittle ran down his cheeks and dripped off his chin. Don strained against the binds holding his wrists but Carl held him close.

"Come a little closer," Don begged. "Just close enough for me to get my hands around that skinny throat of yours."

Rota obliged, seeing that the big blond had him safe.

Don waited until Rota was a foot or so off, then suddenly leaned back in Carl's arms and kicked forward as hard as he could.

Rota clasped his hands over his groin and sank to the ground shrieking in pain.

Like a striking snake, Sanchez stepped forward and hit Don as hard as he could, full in the face. Then, as Don sagged forward, he struck again and again until Don's face seeped blood from a smashed nose and cut mouth and cheeks. If Carl hadn't jerked him away, Sanchez would have beaten the other to death.

"Aah. Take it easy, Sanchy. I wanta get my licks in on this guy, too," Carl said.

"Get him into the house," Sanchez said in murderous tones. "We'll all take turns at him, until the pilot shows up."

ONCE more Don swam from the depths of unconsciousness.

He was lying in a foul mess of straw.

And from the smell, which was of a distinctively personal nature, Don had an idea he had voided in his unconsciousness.

He turned over so that he was lying on his back. His eyes went wide in sudden discovery. Somehow or other while they had beat at him or through the process of dragging him along the ground, the rope had frayed enough so that his movement had torn the last shreds. Slowly, and with infinite pain, he lifted his hands free of the bonds. They ached and burned and itched. But never had flesh felt so good as then, he decided. He lifted a trembling hand to his face and felt the lacerated flesh. His nose was clogged with blood, but as he felt gingerly of it he realized that there were no broken bones. The rest painful, would heal in a while.

He decided to lay still for a while and regain his strength until the time came for him to use it.

He was lying in a stall which was bound by high wooden boards. Overhead, reflected on the ceiling, light played fitfully. There was a low murmur of voices from beyond the stall. He sniffed the air and saliva filled his mouth. Beyond the boards was a room which was evidently used for cooking purposes, from the smell which had come to his nostrils. Don felt the muscles of his belly twitch. He hadn't eaten in a long time.

It took an effort to get to his feet. He was a little shaky. He stood for a short while, recovering, then, making as little sound in the straw as possible, he stepped to that part of the wall closest to the kitchen. Age and damp had warped some of the boards from their neighbors. There were wide spaces between most of them and Don bent his head and peered between the sections.

He looked into a wide, high-ceilinged room, lit by the fitful glow of a smoking

lantern which hung from an overhead rafter. There was wide, thick-hewed table, hand-hewn from the looks of it, in the center of the room. Six men set and lounged around it. A stone fire-place in which hung several pots and a spit, sent out a warming blaze. Something was cooking in the pots as well as around the table, from the odors which came to Don. But he was more interested in the talk which came to his ears.

Sanchez was talking at the moment:

"... The big boy should be here soon. Garvey said he would."

The rat-like one, called, Rota, said in tones of spite:

"Garvey! I don't like that sweet-smelling flower! The last job we did for him . . . I like to see the color of money, first, when he gives us work."

Don saw Sanchez shrug his shoulders. "Don't get your bottom twitching, Rota," Sanchez answered. He said this was the biggest deal we ever had. And Maria showed me plenty. He knows better than to fool with me."

The Dutchman, Carl, his eyes narrowed in an effort at concentration, said:

"Y'know, I don't like this deal. I always said Garvey was a double-crosser. Like when we . . ."

THERE was the sound of a fist banging at the outer door. A man, hidden from Don by the bodies of Carl and Carlos, arose at the sound and walked to the door. Don saw he was dressed in the rough wool clothes of a Chilean peasant. He took down the cross bar with which the door was bolted, and pulled the door wide. Two men walked in. They were both strangers to Don.

"About time you got here," Sanchez said.

One of them was tall, dark, and

burly. He had a thick, rough voice.

"So what?" he asked belligerently.

"So what? We're here, ain't we?"

"Aah. Take it easy, Ramon. These guys think they've got the hardest job in the world. After all, it took four of them to get this guy."

They kept walking forward as they talked, until they reached the table where the others sat. The farmer closed the door but let the bar remain on the floor where he'd put it. He, too, joined the others. The big, dark one called for wine, and after an argument the farmer started for the stall where the prisoner was. Don hot-footed it back to where he had been lying. In a second there was a scraping sound as the farmer pulled the gate free and Don saw, through narrowed eyelids, the clumsy shape of the man enter, and kneel in the corner.

"Phew!" the farmer grunted. "You stink like a pig." He spat at Don as though he were an animal. There wasn't the slightest movement from the man lying in the filthy straw. There was the sound of glass bottles clanking against each other, the creak of the stall gate closing and Don was alone again.

"Like a pig," the farmer kept repeating as he walked back to the table.

But Don no longer cared what he smelled like. The door leading to freedom was open to him. There was only the wooden walls of the stall containing him, now.

Once more he came erect and began a cautious examination of the almost square stall. It was maybe ten feet square. The wooden partition was head high for a six-footer and Don was just under the mark. He discovered that three sides of the stall were of wood but the fourth side had been set flush with the stone wall. As he stood against the wall he felt a cold current of air against

his face. He looked up and saw that the farmer had constructed a window high up, evidently for the purpose of enabling him to get hay to the animal in the stall. The window was set rather high, too high for him to reach even by jumping at the projecting sill.

He cursed the lack of light. The dancing, fitful gleam of the smoky oil lamp threw dark shadows all about. He had to make his way about in a hit or miss fashion, feeling with fumbling fingers along the walls. A thought came to him and he leaned against the damp stone and puzzled it over. If, as he thought, the farmer used the window for feeding reasons, then how did he get the hay down to the animals below? Obviously by one means, a block and tackle. Then where was the rope. He found it after an interval of pawing along the wall. The block worked on a pivot action and when not in use was swung against the wall. His groping fingers had just missed it several times. Now when he was more careful, they found it readily enough.

The sounds of the men in the other room were louder, now, more boisterous. The wine must have been strong or their desire to get drunk, great. He could hear laughing, shouting, and even the bawdy words of a song.

Don flexed his arms, prayed that the muscles were not too stiff, and began a slow climb, using both ropes. He was thankful that the farmer was a thorough sort and the rope was well-greased; there was only the slightest creaking as he went up hand over hand. There was a single real point of danger. It lay in that area between the top of the stall and extended almost to the window. He kept his face to the wall. His clothes were dark, and only the whiteness of his features might show. An infinity of time passed before his fingers sought and found the sill of the

window.

The window sill was almost wide enough to accomodate his body. He let the rope go and perched on the sill for the space of several seconds while he pushed at the window. Once more luck was with him. It opened outward noiselessly. Don hauled the rope up, threw it out of the window, took a last look into the farmhouse and swung out on the rope. This time he didn't care if there was noise. It wouldn't be heard on the inside.

He leaned against the stone, gasping for breath. His side ached and his face felt the rawness of the wind and air as though they were lashes from a whip. The night was dark, moonless, and he could not see more than a few feet in front of him. But somewhere close by he knew there was the car which Sanchez and the others had used. He hoped only, that the keys were in the switch.

ONCE more it was a toss-up what to do. He hadn't the slightest idea where the car or cars were parked. And time was running out on him. Very soon, he figured, they'd come in for him. He was thankful the darkness was as much ins ally as it was their enemy.

And once again luck was at his side. He headed away from the house and hadn't gone more than ten yards when he saw the shape of the large sedan which had been his prison van. The kays were in the switch. He lost little time in getting behind the wheel.

The car was facing the house and he backed it up onto the rutted path leading to the house, turned it away from the house and put the car into gear. Above the roar of the motor he heard a sudden upheaval of shouting, cursing voices. His escape had bee discovered. His mouth curled into a crooked grin of derision as he sped away from his pur-

suers.

He was still lost, however, as far as directions and destination was concerned. Santiago could have been on the moon as far as he knew. But he was happy. Wherever he was going it was in a direction away from them. The headlights gleamed brightly on the packed ground.

It was several hours later that he came to a concrete, four-lane highway. Now he would see markers which point the path. He sped down the smooth pavement with all possible speed.

For the first time that night his thoughts went to the case he was on. What was all this about, he wondered? What had they intended doing with him? Garvey was behind all this, but why had they intended all this elaborate business? It would have been a simple matter to do away with him, Don reasoned. A knife in the back, or a blow to knock him out and with the smell of whiskey on his breath, a car could have run over his neck . . . and any coroner's jury would have said, accidental death.

Then why had they gone through all this? The sudden remembrance of the mention of a pilot came to him. What had a pilot to do with him? They were questions only one man could answer. Garvey was the key to the whole thing.

For the first time he relaxed and looked at the wild mountain scenery. The road stretched ahead, curving and lonely. His was the only car on it. He passed a marker which said Santiago lay only ten Kilometres ahead. He was driving downhill into the city. He began to pass houses by the road and their warming lights gave him a strange feeling of security. Then, of a sudden, he made a last curve and the lights of a large city lay twinkling in the near distance.

He leaned forward, closer to the steering wheel, peered at the road, a smile on his face, and felt the car lurch. He gripped the wheel tightly, took his foot off the gas pedal and braked very gently. A tire had blown. Slowly and carefully, he maneuvered the car onto the shoulder. He breathed a sigh of relief when he got out. The car was a big, clumsy one, not too young in age and of foreign make. It was fortunate, he thought that he was not going too fast when the tire blew.

He got out, looked at the tire, saw it was flat and in a condition only a mechanic could remedy. He decided to walk. It could only be a few miles to town. And he had noticed an increase of traffic. He whistled a cheery tune as he walked along. The road made an S turn and as he came out of it the blazing headlights of a car picked him up. The car was almost abreast when he heard the squeal of brakes applied suddenly and the skid of tires on concrete. He looked sideways and was blinded by the glare of a spotlight's beam thrown full in his face. He heard the car door open but because of the light in his eyes, couldn't see who came out of the car.

He moved along quickly, damning whoever thought it was clever doing what they did. Then he thought it might be a highway patrol car. He stopped and looked back and saw the indistinct figures of two men coming his way. He waited for them. It wasn't until they were practically on top of him that he recognized them.

The tall one was Garvey and the shorter one was Sert.

DON lifted his hands high above his head. The gun in Garvey's fist was sufficient persuasive against foolish actions.

"Get behind him, Sert," Garvey said.

"See if he's carrying a gun."

"He's unarmed," Sert said after a few ineffectual pats at Don's pockets.

Don was only sorry that he didn't have a gun. It would have been the simplest matter to have made short work of these two.

"Guess you're just not lucky," Garvey taunted Don. "You almost made it back to town, too. Oh well . . ."

"I don't think it's wise," said Sert, the ever cautious, "to stand around this way. A passing motorist, you know . . ."

"Yeah. You're right. Get moving, Roseroot."

Don realized how luck had run against him when a car passer going toward town, just as they arrived at Garvey's car. The motor's sound had given them warning and they made Don stand close to the sedan. The other car passed in a *wish* of humming tires. Had Don waited by the side of his car he would have been picked up. He cursed fluently and satisfactorily, his ill-luck.

Garvey's gun nudged him.

"Behind the wheel. You're driving," Garvey said.

"Phew!" Sert said in disgust. "Where has he been lying, in a manure pile?"

"I wouldn't doubt it," Garvey said. "Hermoso's place is a pig sty anyway. And the boys didn't give a damn how they lugged him around."

"Okay," Don said. "Where to?"

"Back to the farm. And don't be a damn fool and try something silly, Jack, cause I'll just let you have it in the car."

"My my! Just a tough baby, huh? You've been seeing too many Chandler pictures, Garvey. I'm just a bitty fish. They're bigger ones and tougher, who'll be after me. You might as well crow, 'cause you'll probably wind up eating it."

Don looked up and grinned at the reflection of the murderous look in Gar-

vey's eyes. But Sert wasn't the kind to pay much attention to words, especially when the content was empty.

"Leave him alone, Garvey. You almost bungled the job, anyway, as is. He's just getting a rise out of you."

"You tell him, fat boy," Don said. "You're the big wheel in this deal. That is until I find Arlen."

"So you think Arlen's alive?" Sert asked.

"If he isn't, then what's all this about?" Don asked, coming right to the point.

Sert gave him one of his patented blank stares. He leaned deeper into the rear seat and adjusted his pudgy body to the cushions.

"A reasonable question," he said in the manner of an attorney addressing a jury, "should command a reasonable answer. You see, my boy, I knew you weren't satisfied after seeing Mrs. Arlen. Of course the fact that your company sent an investigator made me suspicious. So I checked you and found out who you were. It was quite simple. Either you or someone else was going to follow me. Therefore I paid the young man at the plane company to let me know if anyone had followed me. From his description of the man who had asked about my destination, I thought it was you. And following your line of reasoning, I knew you'd want to get here before me, so I cabled Garvey to expect you and prepare for any emergency. I'm afraid that any investigation following your death will leave us quite in the clear.

"OH YES," he went on as though in after-thought. "About your death. All these inquiries you've made . . . at the airport, for example, will only show intent to trace the death plane. So that when the plane you are in crashes on the same peak . . . By the

way Garvey, that's an excellent touch. Isn't it, Roseroot?"

A cold chill raced down Don's back. These boys were really playing for keeps. And now he wasn't sure whether Arlen was alive or not. Not that it was going to make much difference, he thought, grimly. He was just curious as to the manner of his demise. How did they do it? Hire some pilot to commit suicide?

He looked down at the longbarreled gun which was pointing so steadily toward his mid-section.

"Yeah, Jack. Keep looking. Straight ahead. Don't worry about the heater. It won't go off," Garvey said.

But Don wasn't thinking about the gun. He was trying to remember where that sharp curve was in the road. It was still dark. He remembered vaguely, that there was thick underbrush at that point. And the road skirted the sheer walls of the mountainside. He knew his only chance at escape would come at that curve. It was still miles away, however. He gave a sidewise glance out the window. The eastern sky showed a lightening edge of grey. He *had* to beat the dawn!

If Garvey noticed the sudden acceleration of speed, he gave it no heed. This was a faster car than the one Don had made his escape in. It fairly ate up the miles. The speedometer went up to seventy and stayed there. Don pushed his mind to the task of remembering landmarks. A mistake at this point could mean his execution, and he wanted a fighting chance for his life.

There was a pine tree not far from it. It stuck up like a lighthouse on a bleak shore.

The aroma of cigar smoke made itself felt in the car and Don knew how he was going to work it. His eyes narrowed in desperate search. *AAH!* There it was. The pine, not a half mile

off . . . and just beyond a hundred yards, the curve.

And he was level with the pine.

"Say, Garvey," Don said hurriedly. "Gotta smoke?"

"Sure," Garvey said reaching into his trouser pocket for the pack and leaning closer to hand it to Don, the gun in his hand forgotten for the second. It was the second Don had waited for.

He started to reach for the cigarette, and suddenly twisted the wheel inward toward the sheer side of the mountain. Garvey put up a protecting palm. Then the car hit with a grinding, ripping sound. Garvey was thrown forward into the windshield, and Sert almost landed in the front seat. Only Don escaped harm. At the very last second, he twisted the door handle and leaped free.

He didn't wait to see how the others fared. He was interested only in escaping. The brush clasped him in its dark embrace, like a lover welcoming the woman of his dreams.

Don didn't go far. He circled for a few seconds, got his bearings and went back toward the road. Using care, he broke through the underbrush and came back on the road a little above where he'd maneuvered the car into a wreck. He could see the radiator steaming, and could smell the acrid odor of gas. Slowly, hugging the dense brush, he started back for the car.

He saw when he was close enough, that Sert was leaning into the front seat from the outside door. He was trying to drag Garvey free. Evidently Garvey had been hurt. Quickly, Don made up his mind to do something.

SERT hadn't the slightest idea Don was around until he felt the blow at the back of his neck. He fell sideways and rolled off the fender and fell flat on his face. Garvey was curled up

in the seat, blood pouring in a stream from a nasty cut on his forehead. The gun lay on the floor. Don reached down and picked it up. For the first time that night, he felt he had the upper hand.

Turning to the figure of Sert, Don heaved him up and dragged him into the car and shoved him alongside of Garvey. Then he went to the rear of the car and put a bullet through the gas tank. The gas flowed downhill to where it leveled off. Don collected some brush and built a dam across the narrowest part of the flow. Then, when it had collected in a large enough pool, Don stood to one side and threw a lit match into it. It blazed up instantly.

He viewed his handiwork with satisfaction for a second or so, then turned and went back to the car. Sert was sitting on the running board, his head held in his hands. Garvey was also conscious, though still groggy from the blows he'd taken. Don waved the pistol at Sert.

"All right, fat boy. Get up and sit over there." He motioned toward the brush.

Sert staggered to where Don had pointed.

"Now you. Get out and sit by your friend," Don said to Garvey.

There was enough hate in Garvey's eyes to shrivel Don had it the power. But Garvey, too, did as he was told, and with as little hesitation as the other. Something about Don's voice and manner told them he wasn't in any mood to be fooled with.

Don stood far enough away from them so that they stood no chance to get his gun or try for it.

"All right, wise guys," Don said. "We're going for a walk. Just the three of us. You're going in front and I'll be behind, me and this little heater. And the first move out of either of you

. . . Why there'll just be a stiff for the vultures to pick on."

"Listen, Roseroot," Sert said, "this isn't going to do you any good."

"So I like walking," Don said. "Get up and start."

It was all downhill work. Garvey kept staggering as though he was drunk. Sert kept turning his head as though in search of something or perhaps in the hope that rescuers would show up.

Gradually the darkness lifted and the dawn broke. A mist flowed from the trees along the road. The air was damp and chilly. The road was free of cars. The light grew brighter and the mists went to that place where mists go. The three men were all alone on the long winding road which led from the mountains to Santiago. But behind them a half mile, a long, sleek car, with five men in it was tearing down the mountainside.

The three heard the sound of its approach simultaneously, and all turned their heads at once.

"Stand still," Don commanded. He thought to stop it, explain what happened and ask for a lift in. The car zoomed closer, and started to edge over the center as though to pass, when suddenly it swerved back toward them. Don leaped to one side, as the car bore down at him, and cursed the fool driver under his breath.

It skidded to a stop, three men piled out and came at a run for Don. He recognized them instantly. They were Rota, Carl and Carlos.

The pistol in his hand barked twice. Carlos clutched his belly and fell face downward, his legs kicking convulsively as he landed. But the other two came on while those in the car poured a hail of bullets at Don. He stood his ground under the fire and took careful aim. But he'd forgotten Garvey and Sert. It was Garvey who made the flying tackle.

Don twisted in Garvey's grip; the pistol had been knocked from his hand, and clubbed the red-head with his fist. Garvey, still weak from the knock he'd had against the windshield lost his grip. A last punch sent him to one side. And Don stepped in to meet Carl and Rota.

Carl had his head lowered, but Rota came in low, the knife, as usual, held close to his body. Carl charged, but Rota danced in, eyes watchful of Don's every move. Don feinted Carl's hands high and hit him in the belly as hard as he could. It was like hitting a wet bag of cement. Carl's hands shot out and fastened themselves around Don, and clung through the hail of punches Don shot to his head and belly. Carl looked over Don's shoulder, saw Rota behind them, the knife held high now, the point gleaming brightly in the sun, and pointed straight down at Don's back.

"No!" Carl yelled. "Alive. We want him that way."

Desperately, Don brought his knee up, but this time he didn't connect. The arms around him tightened. It was a matter of seconds. There was a judo trick Don knew. Now or never. Bringing both hands together, Don brought them between Carl's and thrust upward as hard as he could. It did the trick. Carl's hands shot outward. But it was all in vain.

In the short time of their struggle the other two in the car came to join the fight. Don gave as good as he got but they were too many. They simply beat him to the ground by sheer weight of numbers.

They didn't bother tying him this time. Carl and the dark-faced one for whom they'd been waiting in the farmhouse, took him up in their arms and lugged him to the car and threw him into the back seat. The others squeezed into the car. Rota his knife still out,

sat on one of the jump seats in the rear. Sanchez, too managed to get in, after they'd wedged him into the corner as far as they could.

"Back to the farmhouse," Garvey commanded. "As fast as you can get there."

THERE was a plane parked on a level spot of ground not far from the farmhouse. The farmer leaned against his house and looked at the plane. Within a half dozen men were sitting at the table. Garvey was talking.

"It's too late for Rios to make rendezvous. We'll have to use the alternate plan. Roberto," he spoke directly to the shorted of the two who had come in the night before. "Do you think you can manage to dump him?"

Roberto shrugged his shoulders. "It won't be too hard," he said. "So long as he's tied nicely. It's an open-cock-pit job."

"Good. Then we'll see you later," Garvey said.

"One minute," Sanchez said softly and clearly.

Garvey looked blandly at him—yet intently.

"The money. It's not enough. Carlos died. It was a risk none of us thought would come. The men want more money."

Garvey turned to Sert and whispered what Sanchez had demanded. Sert put his hand deep into his pocket and pulled out an immense roll of greenbacks, American money. "There's ten thousand here. Give it to them. Only make sure Roseroot dies."

Garvey handed the money to Sanchez and relayed Sert's orders.

"Tell him not to worry," Sanchez said. "The vultures will pick his bones so clean if ever he's found they'll think he was a cow."

Don, bound again, this time with fresh, new rope, lay on his back in the stall, listening to what was being said. He was a dead duck this time, he figured. Nothing or no one could get him out of the mess, now.

He heard the outer door close, and knew that Sert and Garvey had left him to his fate. There was a lower sound of voices from the room beyond, then silence. He heard the stall gate creak, and heard the scrape of feet across the straw. Then rough hands pulled him erect, and he was being carried.

It was all clear to him now.

Rios alone or in the company of another was in on the deal. Sert was behind the whole thing, as was Mrs. Arlen. They had killed Arlen by shooting his plane down as it flew over El Diablo. Sert and Arlen's wife were to collect the insurance, and split, probably with Garvey. And the reason they planned to . . . But something didn't quite jell there. What about Roberto? He was in on it too. Unless he was a fall-guy, and they had talked him into thinking Rios was just to fly there as sort of protection. Then Rios was to shoot the plane down as he had the other. If it were possible, Don would have napped his fingers. That was it of course, it had to be. Roberto was to have been the pilot Don chose to take him over El Diablo. The treacherous air currents of the pass would get the blame for the crash. And World-Wide would be none the wiser.

"Okay," Carl grunted; he was one of those carrying Don. "This guy weighs a ton. Here. Help me get him into the damned cock-pit."

Sanchez and Rota stepped forward to help Carl and the farmer lift the bound man. Don felt a kinship to a canned sardine, it was so close. He had seen the plane, a very up-to-the-minute job. It would be a matter of seconds

now. He heard the pilot moving about in the front cock-pit. And suddenly there was a new sound on the air. Don's ears perked up as he listened closely. There was no mistaking it. It was the sound of a high-powered motor.

"Basta!" someone shouted. "The police."

Don strained against the bonds. They were like steel bands around his wrists. Suddenly the plane's motor raced into sharp living. The car came closer; there was the sound of gunfire from it and the answering fire from those around the plane. Slowly, the plane taxied into the wind. The motor raced, as though in a race against the oncoming police car. And to those watching, the police car lost. For the plane was gathering speed; it was going faster into the wind, in another instant it would be airborne.

And the man at the wheel of the police car sent it straight for the sneek nose of the plane.

Roberto barely avoided the idiot who tried to commit suicide. It was just what the other wanted him to do. For instead of stopping the policeman speeded up and struck the plane full amidships, snapping the part of the tricycle landing gear in two.

Roberto had lost the strange race.

A POLICE guard stood over Rota, Sanchez, the farmer and Roberto. Carl had been killed in the exchange of shots.

"Senor O'Brien came to us, luckily for you. He told us of your mission and said he feared foul play when he called your hotel and found you hadn't been in since early that evening.

"He said he expected a message from you; that you knew he was coming. The trail was not hard to follow. We picked up the woman . . ."

O'Brien, a short, curly-haired Irish-

man, whose face always held a sour look, spoke to Don, from the side of his mouth:

"It was a lucky thing I got to the American consul in time. These mockies wouldn't pay any attention to my moaning. Soon as Stallins got on the phone they listened, but quick. And then I had to use American technique tracing the cabbie. The woman only spit when we asked about you. I got to hand it to the lieut, though. Once we got to that joint in the sticks, he knew how to make them open up. They sang real pretty for him."

"And Kelson was mad because I wanted someone to trail Sert. I'd have been flying high but not pretty if it hadn't been for my hunch. But we've still got to get those guys. And I think Roberto is the boy who's gonna show us where they hang out."

"Roberto," Don said, changing to Spanish. "Of all the suckers I've ever met, you're the biggest."

Roberto gave him a surly look and returned to staring at the floor.

"Sure: That's it. Play dumb. That's the way they want you to act. Man, listen to me. Figure it out. What happened to the other pilot? How is it he never came back?"

Don saw the head lift a trifle.

"Think it over," Don went on. "If you were supposed to be the pilot I hired to take me over El Diablo, how come you came back alone? What happened to me?"

It was a shot in the dark. But it had to be the way things were planned, Don thought. They knew, from what Sert said, of his having gone to the airport. The reason he went was to hire a pilot. And they were right. He had done just that.

"They sold you a bill of goods, Roberto," Don went in inexorably. "Only you weren't going to profit.

That's why Rios was going to meet you there. To shoot you down like he did the other."

Roberto lifted his head. There was a vague look of bewilderment in his eyes.

"Just ask yourself that, fella," Don persisted. "How come you came back alone after I hired you to go above El Diablo? You'd better, because that's what the police would have asked."

The pilot shook his head in amazement. Suddenly the whole thing was clear to him. The American *was* right. Garvey and the fat little man had him in mind for a goat. *He'd fix them!*

"Okay!" the words fairly tumbled from him. "I'll talk. Now I see what their plans were. And I know where you'll find them. I'll show you."

The lieutenant, one other policeman, O'Brien, Roberto and Don piled into the police car and hit the back trail for Santiago. The other man stood guard over Sanchez and the rest until the reserves which were coming would show up.

THE police car, siren blaring a path through traffic, drew many puzzled stares, as it raced through the city streets. The address was in one of the better sections of the city. A haughty doorman looked down his nose at the car as it drew up with a final skidding swirl before the canopied-entrance to a large hotel. He didn't bother opening the door. He wouldn't have had time.

They gathered around Roberto and threw questions at him.

"What's the room?" the lieutenant started for the door. Don stopped him.

"Look," he said. "These monkeys are pretty shrewd. If we all walk in the front door, before we're even close to their room, they'll have word of our coming, because I think they've got stooges in the hotel who're being paid

just to be on the lookout for us. What do you think, Lieutenant?"

"I think you're right. Hernandez, get around the back . . ."

"I'll go with him," O'Brien said. "I know what Sert looks like. That way we can spot them if they try a back-door lam."

Garvey's room was high up, on the top floor of the eight-story building. And when they finally broke into it, it was to discover it empty. Either the birds had flown or they hadn't arrived. The lieutenant called his precinct and had the desk man send a squad out. Then he contacted headquarters and had an alarm broadcast for the fugitives.

"Well, Roseroot," he asked after his calls, "what now?"

Don had been thinking it over. "You say Maria won't talk?" he asked.

"Not her. Not if we pulled at her tongue with hot irons."

"Has she any people in town?" Don asked.

The policeman's lips parted in a grin. He got what Don was driving at. Her parents, especially the mother, would talk readily enough if they were pushed by the police. But what was the idea, he wondered?

Don told him: "They're not here. But where are they? Where would they go? Let's get a play-back on this. Garvey doesn't know that Maria has been picked up. But he found out the moment he arrived in town. So he knows her place is as hot as this.

"Now if I know that cookie, he was keeping that babe. But guys like he, who are hep to the stuff, keep their stuff in more than one nest. Maria won't talk. But I think her mother would know where the other hide-out is. Sometime or other she might have wanted Maria for something and she had to have the addresses of all the spots the

girl was likely to be at. What about that?"

"I don't know. But it's certainly worth a try. We'll have to wait until someone gets here from headquarters, though."

They left the squad men in the hotel while they went back into motion to locate the parents of Maria. It didn't take as long as Don thought it would. As the lieutenant explained, "They came from the country, so they had to register. And the father, being a laborer, had to have a police card. Come along, I think the trail is at its end."

MRS. CORDOBA was a short, broad-shouldered woman, with wide sullen features, who no more looked like she was the mother of Maria than a cow would. She answered the door to their pounding and when she who it was, she flew into a fit of cursing, all of which was directed to her daughter:

"I knew it would come to this! Our home wasn't good enough. Her parents weren't the right kind for her high-class friends. She was always a high-flying one, even as a child . . ."

The lieutenant broke into her tirade: "Do you know where she lived besides the Constanta address?"

Don didn't hear the answer. He had been looking around the small apartment, which seemed to be filled to overflowing with cheap American furniture, and children. There were seven of them who at one time or another and at the end, all at once, came to see what the excitement was. They stood and looked with big-eyed interest at the policemen. A furtive movement behind the partly closed door of a room next to what was the kitchen, attracted Don's attention.

He called one of the children to him, a girl about seven.

"Who's in there, honey?" he asked.

She turned to where he was pointing, looked back to him and said, "Oh. That's Uncle Fernando, from the country."

Don smiled and started to go back to where the lieutenant was still questioning the woman, when, for no reason he could think of, changed his mind and walked to the door and kicked it open gently.

A man was seated by the single window. His back was to Don and all Don could see was a pair of broad shoulders, a head of black, straight hair, and the edge of a profile. Don gave the man greeting, and received a grunted answer, which was given without a turn of the head. Damned grouch, Don thought, and turning, left the room. He didn't close the door. But as he started back to the combination living-dining room, he looked up and into the glass of a cheap mirror hanging on the wall. He was just in time to see the face of the man in the room he'd just left, looking toward the door. Even in the bad glass, he could see the look of vindictive fury in the man's face. There was something familiar in the long-nosed, hawk-like features. And that white scar which seemed to run around the line of the hair at the forehead. . . .

Don shrugged off the feeling he had and continued into the other room.

There was a look of triumph on the lieutenant's face.

"We've got it," he said. "Let's go, Roseroot."

"Where's it at?" Don asked as they hastened back to the police car.

"She had addresses, all right. One of them was above a place, called, 'The Pigeon,' a cheap bar and restaurant."

THE lieutenant deployed his forces around the building and in the alleyway behind it. Then he and three

others, with Don and O'Brien went up the front stairs.

There were two apartments along the shallow hall. Garvey and Sert were in one of them.

There was a short struggle in which Garvey was finally subdued after one of the policemen gave him a workout with a blackjack. But Sert gave up philosophically.

"You are fortunate," Sert said while he was being handcuffed, "that I wasn't here the night before. I wouldn't have let Garvey go through with this elaborate rigmarole."

"You didn't do so hot," Don said. "But it's too late for that. The cop, here, tells me that Rios and the others in the deal will be picked up soon. Then the clamps'll be put on, but good."

Sert shrugged his pudgy shoulders.

"I don't think that our conviction is assured," he said. "There is the matter of the *corpus delicti* of Gilbert Arlen to be considered. And other details . . ."

Don's lips curled. "Could be. But the angle of Wide-World paying out two million in insurance is a dead duck. And you guys weren't too smart. Of course, maybe if you had time for such things as disguises, like dyeing your hair . . ."

He stopped his mouth agape. The man at the Cordoba's, Uncle Fernando . . .

"But Wide-World *will* have to pay out that money," Sert said. "A suit is already on file. I left instructions for that contingency . . ."

"Lieutenant!" Don yelped in sudden excitement. "I think I've got it. Let's go!"

Don stopped before the news-stand near the Cordoba home. Leaping from the police car, he strode up to the vendor.

"Tell me," he said to the bewildered

man, "do you carry any American papers?"

"No, sir."

Don's hopes collapsed. He had expected a different answer.

". . . But I know where to get one. I have a customer for a Chicago paper. A little girl, the Cordoba child, comes every day for it. I wonder who reads English in *that* household. They cannot even read Spanish."

If the vendor thought Don was mad, from the way he'd leaped at him from the police car, he knew for a certainty that he was, after looking at the five-dollar bill Don threw at him.

* * *

Don strode directly to the room in which *Uncle Fernando* was sitting. The man in the chair turned the familiar edge of his profile to the sound of the door's opening. But Don didn't ask any questions, this time. He walked up to the man, the policeman walking at his side, and pulled him around.

"*Arrest this man, Gilbert Arlen, for fraud,*" Don announced.

A bitter smile ringed the dark mouth.

"I had an idea the whole thing was ready to blow up when you stuck your head in the door," Arlen said.

"Yep. Ready to talk?" Don asked.

"Might as well. I'm sure I'll have to, later. It all began . . ."

". . . Arlen knew that his money in Chilean nitrates wasn't worth a cent on the dollar, the moment the Council decided to let Germany manufacture synthetic nitrates," Don said to Kelson. "What's more, the moment the rest got wind of it, his stocks would go tumbling. So he cooked up this scheme with the aid of Sert and Garvey. I got the wrong angle in thinking that Rios shot down the Haviland man because he didn't want him to tell that he dumped

Arlen. But he shot him down because he didn't want him to say anything about dropping Arlen off after a short trip to the farmhouse out in the country.

"There's no getting around it, Kelson, if these wise guys would stop trying to be *too* clever and let our natural dumbness betray us, they'd be better off. But they wouldn't let me make an investigation. And after all, what could I have done? Just fly over that damned pass and see the remains of the plane, and wire my report. But no. Garvey has to get smart and sic the girl on me. The moment she began calling me, Jack, I knew there was something fishy."

"Look, baby," Kelson said, "anytime my gut growls like that, there's always something wrong. Never fails."

"Okay gutty. What now? And don't tell me you've got another belly-ache."

"No. Matter of fact, I'm going to give you a real vacation. Two weeks . . . with pay!"

There was a smile of speculation on Don's face.

"What're you thinking of?" Kelson asked.

"Y'know. I left a certain red-head in a tavern, a week back. I'm just wondering if she's still waiting. . . ?" Don said.

★ THE BEST OF ENEMIES ★

By ALICE RICHARDS

IT HAS often been said that the Civil War was the most tragic war that our American history books relate, but if it was that, it was also the most remarkable in bringing to light many incredible happenings.

As the two opposing armies were so close, many related by blood and surroundings, it was easily understandable that the hatred and animosity which first was keenly felt would eventually be forgotten by the men who were fighting during all those long years of war.

When the Blue Coats were on one side of the Little Rapidan River, in Virginia, and the men in gray were camped on the other side, the men would often meet in the middle of the stream while swimming and exchange gossip and food, while shaking hands. The men often traded, the Northerners, their coffee for the Southerners' tobacco. Oftentimes, when the weather was cold, clothes were exchanged, too, if they could be spared, and sometimes, men swam across the small stream just to pay a friendly visit to the enemy.

Here is a story to prove this point. It was related by General J. B. Gordon, of the Southern Confederate Army, that one day, while riding along and inspecting his lines, he noticed a great commotion among some of the men, and riding up to them, he demanded to know what had happened to cause it. The men said it was nothing, and the general was about to dismiss the whole affair and ride away when he saw in the weeds a faintly discernible bulk. The weeds were moving slowly, and he ordered one of his men to cut them down to ascertain the reason behind the movements. When this was done, a man, hardly more than a boy and nearly undressed except for

a few tatters of clothing, was uncovered from the patch in which he had been hiding. It would have been hard to determine which uniform the youth wore, for there was so little left of it, but the general learned from the soldier that he belonged across the river in the other camp, and that he had come across just to visit the "Johnnies" while there was no fighting going on.

THE general could hardly keep from laughing, but pretending to be very stern, he demanded if the boy knew that there was a war going on in the country, and finally decided that to teach him a lesson, he was going to take him prisoner and send him to Richmond.

At this point, the Yankee turned pale, as did all the Confederate men around the two. One of them finally spoke up and told the general he could not do that, because they were the ones who had invited the Union man to come across for a visit, and had promised to protect him, and it would be a matter of honor and human decency to do so.

The general could not possibly refuse a request like this, and after pretending to deliberate on it for some minutes, he finally turned to the shaking youth and said, "Now, if I permit you to go, will you promise me, on the honor of a soldier—"

And before the general had time enough to complete his statement, the man in blue had hoarsely shouted "Yes sir!" and had raced for the water, leaped in, and swam to the Union side of the river.

The general rode on, and it is more than probable that it wasn't too long after this episode that the men took to coming across the river to visit once more.

BESSIE, THE SMUGGLER

By PETE BOGGS

★ The female of the species is more dangerous than the male; smuggling was a woman's game! ★

EVEN in the old days smuggling was not confined to the male sex alone. Among the few hardy females who risked life and limb by engaging in the business was Bessie Catchpole, who lived in the early nineteenth century. She became familiar with the occupation as a smuggler's wife. Her husband owned the ship Sally, and was successful at his trade. That is, until the day he tangled with a law enforcement officer, and was killed.

Bessie decided to carry on. First she established herself to her late husband's crew as boss. Dressed as a man, wearing a cutlass, and smoking a pipe, she appeared before the men. Astonished, they stared at her, and one of the men laughed. Striding up to this one, Bessie pointed out that he had laughed at his skipper, then promptly knocked him down—and out. Not cut to the feminine pattern of her times was she! From that time onward, there was no doubt that she was boss.

In spite of her courage, she avoided scraps with the revenue men; knowing all the tricks of the trade, she employed strategy whenever possible. One quiet evening when Bessie was carrying contraband brandy, a revenue cutter suddenly appeared in the distance. The wind died down al-

together, and the two ships were becalmed a short distance apart. When darkness came, Bessie set her crew to saving her good French brandy. All the casks were simply fastened together with floats and dropped into the sea. The next morning the revenue officers came over in a small boat to search for her cargo. They found nothing, and strangely enough did not suspect her of trickery. They sailed away, whereupon Bessie's ship chased the floating barrels, and recovered them intact.

She also used another ruse, which was considered quite original. Sighting a revenue boat, when her holds contained unlawful cargo, she would hoist a flag of yellow cloth, the signal that plague was present. The cutter would give the Sally a wide berth.

Then there was another trick which though quite common, worked effectively for a time. Two sets of sails were carried, each set a different color. When the smuggler knew she had been identified by the sails of one color, she changed to the other color. When she thought the officers would be watching for sails of this other color, she would change back to the first set. For some time she very advantageously played hide-and-seek with the harassed revenueurs, springing on them one trick after another.

DESTRUCTION FROM WITHIN

By ART RELIS

★ Insecticides and chemicals—phooey! ★
We still have termites in our houses.

TERMITES do a tremendous amount of destruction in this country each year, although in the twenty years since their invasion of the United States much has been learned as to how to combat them. Formerly they were common only in the tropics, but since 1926 they have advanced into almost every section of our country.

They do their damage by devouring dead wood of all descriptions, tunneling through it, and undermining its strength until it is useless. Building foundations, walls, and floors have been ruined by the depredations of this monster in insect form. Telephone poles, wooden fence posts, and even furniture, have all collapsed without warning due to the borings of the termite. Shunning the light, they work from within, so that the damage is done before one is aware of their presence.

Similar to ants, they are sometimes erroneously called "white ants." Ants, however, are the nat-

ural enemy of the termite, and termite soldiers protect their workers from attacks by ants. Like the ants, they live underground in well-organized nests. There are the king and queen, who are the breeders; the soldiers, who protect the workers; the workers themselves, blind, silent, ravenous; and the swarms who develop wings and fly away, only to lose their wings and bore into the ground, to form new nests as king and queen. Strange and extraordinary is the fact that these creatures cannot digest wood, although that is their chief food. Within their digestive tracts live the tiny one-celled protozoa, which are a necessity for the digestion of the wood through a complex process.

Men who build today must consider the termite, and utilize modern methods of preventing its entrenchment; owners of older structures must be on the lookout for signs of the insect, so that irreparable damage may be avoided.



The Spanish swords were red with Chetumal blood, but my Indians took their toll

THE PRINCESS AND THE RENEGADE

by Richard S. Shaver

The mighty hosts of Spain led by Cortez himself, were stopped by the men of Chetumal and their renegade leader—Gonzalo Guerrero!



of Spaniards, jumping from the trees and slashing furiously with obsidian axes!

CORTEZ sent ransom for two survivors of a shipwreck among the unconquered natives of Yucatan, in the section called Naia. But one, Gonzalo Guerrero, wanted no deliverance. He didn't approve of Spaniards, as they learned when they attacked the people from whom they had tried to ransom him . . .

Do not fret about the presence of this white man among us, my Osana. He is but a wandering old missionary who is not quite bright. But by him I can send a letter to my people in Spain, and that is something I have long

wanted to do.

I can only tell him in my own words how it all was, and what he writes is his business, since I cannot read well enough to know surely what the characters say.

I want my family to know why I have turned against my King and my people, for my old mother would grieve, not knowing ever what has become of me.

No, he does not know the tongue of the Chetumals. He speaks only the tongue of old Spain. That has no word for happiness, no words for our way of

life.

Spanish abounds in words for evil, for gold and cruelty and war and misery. He could not understand us, Osana, even if he spoke our tongue. It is only my concern for my old mother that lets me spend my time upon this old man and his scratching pen, instead of in bright play and laughter with you and the children. It will soon be over and I will send this old mumbler of God's sweet words upon his way. Do not fret, Osana.

Now, old fraud, I will tell you the story of what has happened to me in the new world, and you will write what you can understand for my mother to read if the letter should ever reach her. She would die easier, knowing I was alive and doing well. Naturally you cannot write everything I say, but I will tell you all, leaving nothing out, and then you can choose what would best please an old woman's ears about her best loved son. It will be a great deal to write, for I want her to understand that I have done right and not wrong as she may have heard.

CHAPTER I

MY MOTHER knows my life well enough up to the time I became a sailor on Valdivia's ship the Estelita. But after that I have been unable to write my mother, a duty I would not neglect. So I will begin with my voyage from Darien to Hispanola. She has probably heard of the fate of the ship.

Always, in these seas, a sailor lives with a sense of danger. One does not know, as a sailor should, what lies under the heaving blue water. That is not good, it is defiance of fortune. One should not hold Mother Sea in such contempt.

Good sailors are hard to get, and there is a reason for that. The soldiers

get the benefits, the plunder and gold of these voyages, the sailor takes nigh as many risks with no hope of gain. So they are coaxed to come to the new world with lies and promises of no meaning at all.

That is why I came to the New World as a soldier, for I have had training in both trades. And in others, too. For instance, I spent some years of my youth traveling with a puppet show, making the little wooden people dance and act, weep and cry and love. I liked that better than soldiering or sailing, but a man must have gold to live well. That is why I enlisted under Cortez.

I was with him in Tenochtitlan, with him in disaster and in triumph. And I, like others, was cheated out of my share of the gold.

I was drafted into this sailor's unprofitable job, because no one with wits to sail a ship properly was at hand—and in my cups I had mentioned that I was raised a sailor, but had become a soldier by taste. So I am bound back toward Spain by way of Jamaica, with a load of good red gold in the hold, and precious little of it will I get for the job. Even the title of Captain is denied me. The Captain is an empty-headed fool of noble blood, and so far as I am concerned, I am only a sailor.

A good sailor should have in his mind a picture of the sea's bottom. But that is acquired from experience, by study, and most of all by listening to grey-beards who have spent their lives upon the sea.

There are no such sailors in these waters. These seas are chartless and completely unknown to Spanish sailors. Including me, Gonzalo Guerrero. A Spanish name, I myself have little Spanish blood. And little love for Spain or Spaniards, but fate has thrown me with them.

HERE, off Maia land, off these dark forested, unknown and mountainous coasts, the seas might contain great rocky teeth just under the surface. This ship, the Estelita, might even now be sliding by within feet of such reefs and never a man know they were there.

"'Zalo, do you hear the sound of surf?"

"I hear nothing, my captain, Sir."

"We should be fifty miles out to sea, yet I sense something wrong. I thought perhaps you could hear with your sailor's ears what I could not."

"Nay, I hear nothing. But anything could lie ahead. We ride deep, with that cargo of bullion pulling on the Estelita; she does not feel right. She seems to worry about the blood that was spilled in the getting of that gold, too."

"Bah, 'Zalo, a ship does not worry!"

"When the Captain worries, the ship worries. It is the same to a sailor."

I do not blame Valdivia for hearing "surf." There is something evil about bearing this stolen loot of a slaughtered people across Mother Sea. The sea herself hates us.

Oh, Mother Sea, I am Gonzalo Guerrero, the name and the race fate has given me. Do not blame me for the crimes of others. My shipmates call me 'Zalo, because they are lazy of speech. Remember I am only a sailor, and did not cause the crimes that loaded this ship with gold.

This new land, I like too much to want to harm it. My shipmates fear it, and are glad to leave for home. Me, I have no desire to return to the evil life of the cities, the bad laws of my homeland which are worse than the bandits and outlaws which infest it. It is a sick land, Spain.

This new land is very beautiful, lovely as no civilized land ever can be lovely.

We call ourselves civilized, we Spanish. Yet some of these red men we call barbarians and savages are more civilized by far. I have seen them spread more luxurious and delightful feasts, wear more rich garments, more jewels and beadwork, more ostentatious show than any parsimonious old greedy Hidalgo ever dreamed of possessing.

"'Zalo, the wind is rising! Think you are in for a storm?"

"You are the captain, sir. These things are for you to decide. If you hear surf, we should take in sail, use the lead. If you think a storm is rising, order the sail lightened. You must not ask *my* advice, sir!"

"I'll ask your advice as often as I like 'Zalo! You are known for a wise head at sea, young as you are. I'm no sailor born and bred, as you. And keep that tongue in your head! You are known for that, too."

"No sailor can tell you what lies ahead in these seas, sir. None know!"

"If the moon would come out from behind those clouds, if the wind would drop . . ."

THERE is a breath breathes out from these forested coasts, an air of fecundity—one feels that though devils may be watching from under the great trees, there may be also female devils who would make one's days all delight, and would do one no harm.

A beautiful people, many of these red savages. I have seen them come down to our boats to see the "Men with Beards," to see our trumpery trade goods, —naked as angels, with a golden hued skin and the faces of curious children; nay, cherubs! Strong and gentle and well shaped and full of health and good living.

Back in Darien, where I led this ship with silver and gold stripped from the Temples of these "barbarians," the

Indians one sees are not so beautiful.

Mournful, shrunken hulks they are, there. Work and bad food and beatings; the fare of Spain's slaves is not good.

The ship is heavy, the Estelita. She does not seem to answer her helm well. She is of unlucky repute. I would not be on her had not Vasco Nunez de Balboa given the order. I do not like the ways of this Valdivia. But sailors cannot be made out of ordinary men. The soldiers know but little beyond how to fire a musket, beat a mule, to march in step, or sharpen a sword to cut themselves upon. Tie a knot, climb a ratline, or furl a sail, never.

Soon, we should reach Jamaica. But then, ah, the way is long across the wide ocean to Old Spain.

It is miraculous, when a sailor stops to think of miracles instead of work, that any of our ships ever reach port at all. These seas are new and wide, the reefs and currents and landmarks of the coasts uncharted. My grandfather would have thought a sailor *mad* who ventured out of sight of the landmarks of the coast. No way to know then where the reefs lie! My grandfather was right!

Now, we sail blindly out into unknown seas with only fortune to guide us safe. Sometimes we return. Often these ships to the New World do *not* return! But they do not tell the sailors that, if they can help it! The Gold draws *them* to the risk, the sailor gets little of that, so they pretend it is safe. It is the way of these modern times to take long chances on the hope of great gain. The gold of these mighty unknown cities of the Red Peoples is the lure that draws many to their deaths in these uncharted seas. Foolhardy, to think a ship can sail where no one has ever sailed before, without—eh?

"'Zalo, it is surf! I see it as well as hear it! Port the helm! Por Dios, rock ahead!"

A shuddering as of pain through the ship, the masts suddenly staggering against the sky, everyone lurching. . . .

"Too late, my captain! The hull is ripped. The sea pours in, though we have passed the first teeth of the reef. She is already sinking, by the feel of her!"

Aye, the gold *was* unlucky. Blood was on it, the blood of innocents, people such as Mother Sea loves. She would not let pass this ship! There is *so much* gold, though. Always one hears word of a new city discovered, hidden from our soldiers by the lies of the Indians—and who can blame them? Without steel, without horse, without good military training, even these poor Spanish troops are too much for them.

I shall get in that boat *first*, I know when a ship is sinking! The others can peer into the hold if they wish, they will only lose their place in the boat. Seats for twenty, and a hundred to fill them. One of these cutlasses should help to hold my place at the oar. Two oars, no sails aboard, no time to go for water, for another would seize the place that is mine—by the right of this cutlass!

"Come, Captain, get in! There is no use to shout orders, one of the dogs will knife you to have your place if you stand there like that! Sit here, sir. *Lower away*, friends, and goodbye! *Leap in* when she strikes the water, *I will help* you aboard. *You others get a blade if you try it!*"

Yes, without our Old World knowledge of war, how can the Red Nations hope to keep their gold, or their girls, or their land either? Yet, it is sad, and it would please no-one better than me if a great leader rose among them and threw Spain and all she stands for back

into the sea. Yet our soldiers think of them as devils, stupid devils to be killed or enslaved. Evil we have brought to these shores, we Spanish! The blood that has been shed! I was glad to leave the scene of so much misery, and turn again to the bright, clean empire of the Sea.

This Valdivia is an unlucky man. Not even a watch set in the crows nest, nor a man in the bow! I will bet the share of that gold that should have been mine if it were not going to the bottom (or if these Castilian officers did not cheat me out of it) that Valdivia will row about the ship all night to see if the Estelita will stay afloat. Useless, for that blow at those old timbers made an opening for Mother Sea that no piddling pump will ever lift.

Water boiling on the rocks all around her! Had I not been mooning at the wheel I should have seen those rocks myself. On a sea no more dangerous than a rocking chair, we manage to fall from the chair! Dios grant we do not land on our heads.

"No, comrades, you can not climb aboard! The boat will sink. Very well, if you prefer to die with your hands slashed off! Let go! Take it in the throat, then dog!"

"You are a hard man, 'Zalo! I could not use a cutlass on a drowning man."

"Captain, it is they or us. Personally, I prefer myself. Too, he is the one who should have been on watch in the bow. He was elsewhere—now I am to give him my place in the boat. Oh, no, my Captain!"

"I suppose if you had been Captain of the Estelita, she would be afloat now?"

"That is quite true, Sir. Quite, quite true!"

Senor Valdivia does not like to hear that. He is quiet, sad. He is guilty only of being ignorant of many things a

man must know to sail the sea in safety. To see his ship plunge beneath the waves, full of good red gold and cursing soldiers, and to know it is in truth his fault.

Cursing soldiers, drowning! Better that they sang hymns. Though I cannot believe that a sane God would listen, considering the blood on their hands and upon the cargo that ship bears to the bottom.

Day! Day, and the sun, and no water! No sail! One of the oars lost in the night! Truly this voyage was unlucky from the beginning. To sit and wait for death is all that is left us.

NIGHT, again. I, 'Zalo, the lowly seaman, can drink in the beauty of the moon upon the water. Water one cannot drink. The beauty of the sea and the water of the sea are different in that.

Tonight, the sea is again a mother. Peaceful. Last night she was just a little angry about the gold with the blood of her innocents upon it, while tonight she is no longer angry at all.

I think of the sea as a woman. Sailors do, quite often, not having any other woman near. I think of the waves as the many white-tipped blue breasts of some strange, thinking, monstrous, Goddess of a creature, alive; and the phosphorescent trails left by the fish as the thoughts that pass through the sea-monster-mother's mind. A kind of soft, watery, mother of a monster, the sea. Then the wind blows, her thoughts reflect the anger of the sky-monsters, and she lashes back at them with her heaving breasts that become arms, protean angry arms. Sailor's fancies are often far stranger than that!

The wind has fallen, since last night, the moon is now riding high and clear, there are a few small clouds on their

way to some Hermaphroditic tryst in the far eastern skies.

Another day, another sun, hotter than before. The faces take on a pinched, *old*, crazy look, the water is going out of them. They look longingly at the blue lapping wavelets. It sounds so good, to drink . . . ah! Soon they will drink it. Maybe I will too. . . .

Another night, and we are *two less*. Eighteen, now, where we were twenty. These conquerors of Indians cannot conquer a little thing like having no water. Great fighting men, yes. But sense, in this crisis, not an iota! I am not proud of being Spanish. I am ashamed of the way they weep and pray and look at each other; hungry, maybe, for the others blood.

Morning, and another man is gone. The sun again, leering brazenly at us, no pity in that Aztec God, not after what we have done to the Children of the Sun. Aztec, that sun, and the God of most of these Indians. He is truly enjoying this boat, from the way He concentrates upon it.

We are all too weak to care now. When one drinks sea-water, we let him. When one leaps over-board, we only envy his courage in ending what is evidently going to be a losing fight.

Another day, and the last of the soldiers went overboard. Only Valdivia is left of all the Spanish uniform. The rest of us are sailors, better able to stand this ordeal. I have been shipwrecked before, myself.

Valdivia is stout, well fleshed, young and without imagination to drive him mad. He sits and curses the sea, which is unlucky, and does nothing with great ease and naturalness. He is of noble blood. He has never done anything in his life but learn to handle his sword

and think of labor and struggle for other men to accomplish for him.

At last—surf again in the night! I leaped clear as the boat overturned, swam and struggled ashore. Counting heads, out of the twenty, but thirteen men still survive. That is how things fare under a Captain like Valdivia.

THE long golden beach, the beating surf rolling in from the bright, clean sea, and behind us the fecund, visibly growing jungle. That *jungle* fills me with both dread and longing. There is an attraction in it, the attraction of a new world, of a new life, an attraction such as one must feel for a vampire or succubus or a capricious but lovely woman.

"'Zalo, Indios! They come, Todos los santos, they come!"

"Ai! captain, they come! No use to run. Their naked bodies are healthy. ours are weary and weak and held down by water-soaked boots on our feet. Face them and fight, and die, that is all that is left."

Beautiful bodies, yellow-brown and muscled, but smaller than our own. Painted and feathered, they race along the beach toward us howling like Devils, waving spears and bows. They do not even bother to throw the spears at us. They trip us up and tie us like pigs, bear us off into that green mystery, the jungles of Yucatan. This is "Maia," one of the sailors gets an Indio to say to him. I must learn the tongue of these people. It looks as though I would be here a long time.

Correction, 'Zalo! You will not have to be here a long time. Certainly Valdivia is leaving soon. Already he is turning over a fire, still screaming weakly although the spit is thrust right through him. Strong, eh? They do not even dress their meat before they put

it on the fire, just thrust a stake through it and place it over the fire. These are *truly* savages! Ah, thank Heaven he is dead! A man could not live *long* with a spit through his bowels and chest. That is good, I will not suffer long.

Three more of us gone, turning over the fires of those cannibals. The rest of us in cages, wooden cages.

Odd, how they take the roast heart out of the bodies and lay them on the old stone altar.

It is a weed-grown altar before a ruin of a temple. Evidently these are a people who have gone back. Once they built such tremendous palaces of stone for their God. Now they offer him the heart of their sacrifice almost grudgingly, as if the God were gone back into the sky. Certainly no God really lives with these people anymore.

I wonder if that blue Castilian blood of Captain Valdivia's made a better flavored roast than the commoner flesh sailors that died with him? They offer us some of the meat!

That is not the way to fatten a Spanish prisoner, my friends. And I had thought these Indios a better race than my own, with their gentle, mournful eyes, graceful gestures, and fine bead-worked garments, so carefully and beautifully woven. These savages are of a different stripe than those I had met before!

Now they drink great gourds of wine, I *guess* it's wine, and become drunk as Spanish Hidalgos around that grisly feast. The skeletons still smoke and grin above the dying fires.

The long green afternoon drags on. The myriad wide-leaved vines of the jungle wall coil themselves in the heat not far off. How good that green and savage Hell can look to a man who is waiting for his turn over a cook fire. Ai! I had a fear of that jungle, but it has vanished before the greater fear of

these "innocents" of nature's green halls.

Those coiling vines that sheath the near jungle paths from the sun at last relax and wrap themselves in sleep and the dark sweeps down. They have hidden their terrible green beauty from the eyes of men. I lie down. But not to sleep. It is not quite dark.

I look out along the ruined paves of a great city plaza, a city long dead. Still used by these degenerate children of the once great people who built the city, and who let the jungle creep up and tear at the crumbling walls, heave up the pavings with the roots, cover the houses with their green reaching. Between the dead city and the growing jungle there is a wide place where the green is not so thick. There, are huts of woven branches, more livable than the falling walls of the ruined houses.

TOWARD me from out of the shadows comes a golden-hued maid, naked as an angel but for an apron of beadwork. She carries two tall graceful jars such as only a "stupid" Indian could make. A Spaniard can only marvel at the grace of them, wondering how such beauty can be worked into a simple jar of baked clay. She stops nearby, lets down the jars into an ancient well, the coping is crumbling and unmended. She seems to be hurrying before the utter dark makes the trip unsafe.

"Mool!" I call to her. It is the Indian word for water, I have heard. She brought me one of the jars, handing it to me prettily through the opening in the bars.

Mournfully and pityingly she looks at me, such a look as only one slave can give another even more unfortunate. I cursed the Spanish tongue that would not serve to tell her what I wanted, to unfasten the cage.

When you are about to be eaten, and know death is very near—it is then that a maiden looks the most dear, the most beautiful, the most irresistible. To me, that golden skinned maid looked like all the angels of Heaven, her eyes like jewels from the breast of night, and her two high breasts like moons in autumn. Her waist was the column which holds up eternal happiness above, her arms reaching the jar to me were poems of grace and soft woman-being.

I must have looked pretty good to her too, for she looked quickly at the drunken savages about the fire in the distance, made a mouth of disgust and fear, and one of her quick little hands undid the lashings that held the cage door in place.

I was out of that cage like a tiger, and she sprang back into the shadows in fear of my sudden movement. But I worked swiftly on the doors of the other cages, and my friends, now but nine, heaved their trembling limbs out the small doors. Creeping through the shadows, on all fours, we made our way toward the now black wall of jungle, so near and yet so far away.

As we pushed into the wall of green leaves I dared to raise up and look back, and found my view of the savage encampment blocked by those two breasts and that odd, wise smile of the golden maid. She had followed, was going with us! My heart was very glad, somehow. One's heart is usually better to be trusted than the conniving thoughts of one's head.

WE SPENT a long time in that jungle. Days became weeks, and I lost track of time entirely. The first days we doubled on our tracks, entering streams with our tracks leading upstream on the mud of the shore, then in midstream wading or drifting down with the current. We had no desire to

be eaten! Whatever fate the small golden maid was fleeing from, she was certainly quite as anxious as ourselves to put distance behind us.

Happiness is a strange thing. It came strangely to us as the golden limbs of "Osana" glided before us. There is a peace in these forests, when you get above the madly teeming swamps, into the higher land of hardwoods. There are even oak and beach trees, — familiar they seem, as at home! Yet ever watchful one must remain, and the maid was good at knowing danger, and avoiding it. For hours we would sit in the gloom of a thicket, because she would not move, and we could not, without her. Without her we did not know what to eat, which direction to take, all were the same. She knew exactly how to stay alive, her mind was somehow a part of this land, at home here in these gloomy aisles, scintillant with the same strange, wild, fierce and yet peaceful forest beauty.

Sitting thus, waiting for the passage of some danger we could not even sense, but which she knew was there, we talked, Osana and I. Slowly, bit by bit, I picked up her speech. And slowly, bit by bit, I picked up something else, a shy and beautiful thing, her love. It was always to me, Zalo, the lowly; that she turned to hiss a warning. She had "Indian hearing" and that is a very wonderful thing, which a man cannot believe until he has experienced its wonder. Miles away she could sense a war party of enemy savages; far, far before a man's ears could possibly pick out the soft footfalls on the fallen leaves, she knew how many and in which direction they traveled. So we avoided, by Osana's strange senses, what we could not have avoided any other way.

For this land is not an empty land,—it teems! With animals, yes; but with

men of many kinds, too. There are cities, she tells me, great beyond thinking; Holy Cities where men come on pilgrimages from thousands of miles to see and talk with the "Gods."

Other cities there are like this Xamancan with its King, "Ah-Kin-Kutz." It is near us, and we must pass across that King's land to reach a place of safety, her people. "*Ah Kin Kutz*," she says often, making a face of Fear. I gather he is a very ugly man, a very stupid and obstinate man, but no so much to be feared as the cannibals from whom we have escaped.

This is the danger she fears the most, she has no regard for such simple dangers as jaguars or the man-crushing spotted monster snakes that drop from the trees upon their prey. She can sense such dangers before they get even close, and we have sharpened wooden shafts, hardened in the fire. There are nine of us, and she thinks we could handle a jaguar if he did spring upon us. But the animals seem to fear us quite as much as we them, and flee from the strange scent of the Old World we bear upon us.

She fears the Indian hearing of some of the hunters of Ah Kin Kutz, who are always on the prowl. Not all Indians have this strange sense, it is a gift of their heathen Gods, and she fears that one of those will sense our passage and set a trap for us, not eat us. Ah Kin Kutz will make slaves of us, not eat us. She has no desire to be a slave.

"How come you to be safe and alive among the cannibals who meant to eat us, Osana?"

"Ah, Zalo, you must know I am a royal person. In Chetumal, my home, there is a great people who would pay many things for my release. The savages who captured our party on our pilgrimage to the deserted Holy City ate the others, yes. But me they held

for the ransom. It is a custom. They tell Ah Kin Kutz, he tells my father, King Nachancan of Chetumal, that he knows where I am, and can get me for a certain price. My father cannot then declare war, for he does not know who holds me or where I am, so he pays. It is an old custom to get such ransom for Royal captives."

"You are a Princess, Osana! I can not believe that!"

OSANA put on such a dignified air than I burst out laughing. This made her very angry, and she would not speak to me for days. I did not know that to call her a liar was worse than to strike her. I did not know then that the Citizens of Chetumal were an honorable people, and that their law punished liars more severely than thieves. I had much to learn about the better class of Indians.

I watched her more observantly now. I had felt very superior and condescending toward the near-naked maid, dirty from the constant struggle through the forest, weary yet smiling always.

Now I saw the quiet dignity that was hers, the inborn courage and confidence that animated her. Slowly within me grew a respect, something of that awe that one feels before a true Queen, something of that which makes a crowd of strong men bow the knee in homage. It is strange how this knowledge of her slowly changed my thought toward her.

Our luck couldn't hold. Even Osana's Indian sensitivity couldn't keep us out of Ah Kin's clutches. It had to happen, somehow, the way it did. Everything seemed to work that way.

The magical spell of beauty that is the virgin forest's own was broken for us by the first knowledge of pursuit given us by Osana. She stopped and gestured us to silence, standing like a

statue of a maid, a woodnymph in dusky Ivory, or of Gold mellowed to a flesh-like warmth by admixture of some red magic of blood . . . holding one hand to her eyes to shut out unwanted light and extraneous impressions, her face one mask of *listening* to something no white man ever listened to—the impressions given the mind by a sense no white ever has—the Indian *far-hearing*, or far-sight. What it was she heard or how she knew that it was not her own imagination fooling her, I cannot know, but she cried out in fear as though she saw with her eyes some painted army sweeping down upon us from the gloomy forest aisles. Gloomy, yes, but lovely as even the sea cannot be lovely.

"Zalo, they come, the soldiers of Ah Kin Kutz, they come for us. They have learned of our presence, some way; from the savages who held us maybe. They search, they beat through the forest in a wide circle all ahead. Only by going back the way we came can we escape! Oh, Zalo; I was sure we would make it . . . And now all is lost!"

"Is there no way, Osana? Think, we can't just give up. . . ."

"We will go directly away from them! I can hear them, they can hear us—with luck we can get too far away. If we cross enough water, we can lose them."

Following Osana's lead, we started off directly along our back trail. When the back trail wound about a big swamp, we plunged straight across. That was our first mistake.

THE swamp was filled with myriads of singing insects. My ear-drums ached. The daily deluge of rain began. Mid-afternoon, it was. The impenetrable wall of giant trees stretched up and out of sight—we slogged along

after Osana's light feet wearily. Tangled networks of vines and creepers; banana trees and sapote trunks grew thickly between the larger trunks of cypress and mahogany.

We soon found it was impossible to move through the swamp except by cutting a path—and we had no knives!

Osana tried to break through an opening before us, wriggling her slender, graceful, near-nude form between the thick growth—but, concealed by the great, thin leaves were three inch thorns! Thorny branches, spiny vines laced across her bare body, raising great bloody welts. The rest of us, trying to push on through and turn and extricate her—were soon in like shape. It took us hours to work out of the black, thick muck in a direction at right angles to our chosen course. Every move was agony.

Osana looked at me and grinned her usual cheerful smile. "Better learn not get angry. No use!"

We were streaming with blood, but aside from the few great welts of her first contact with the thorns, Osana had come through unscathed. I saw what she meant.

That night when we made camp, I removed my sloshing boots, thinking they were filled with water. I was frightened to find they were filled with blood. Dozens of leeches had fastened on my legs. They were covered with tiny red spots from which the blood oozed steadily. The bite of the leech does not close, but keeps on bleeding because of some slime the leech exudes. These wounds, of which we all had a great many, became infected and we all were limping and sick with them.

We made little progress next day, and Osana's bright face became steadily more and more sad, beginning to take on the resigned expression of a slave which it had worn when I first saw her.

I knew our pursuers were close, and we pushed on as hard as we could. But our adventure with the swamp had been disastrous. Then, as we turned into a game trail, we nearly lost our lives.

Osana screamed—"Coatl . . . Ah! Big snake, Zalo!"

I ran forward to her side, but try as I might could see nothing frightening. Only a giant grey tree trunk. Osana was frantic.

"Can't you even see him! Ohhhh! White man blind . . ."

Then the breeze moved the leaves a bit and a ray of sunlight fell squarely upon a glittering, hypnotic eye in a great green mottled head. Following it back, what I had thought was limb on trunk became the vast bulk of a boa constrictor lying close along a low overhanging branch. Ten feet of terrible strength lay poised like a triggered trap above the trail, like a living dead-fall awaiting our step. The rest of its terrible coils wound out of sight in the shadowing leaves of the tree. Osana dragged us back and back, did not breathe easier until we had passed around it a hundred yards beyond.

We had hardly gotten out of sight of the place when a small cyclone seemed to strike the jungle behind us. I caught a glimpse of yards and yards of mottled death dropping upon the half seen form of a painted warrior. His scream was high, keening with awful agony, suddenly cut off. It must have been half an hour before the jungle was quiet behind us, the brown, long nosed monkeys kept shrieking their fear, the parrots mocking the monkeys as if in bravado, scornful of the monkeys fear, and in every direction some startled animal took fright and crashed off through the bush.

OSANA'S sharp eyes and superior senses had saved us from a fright-

ful death—and one of our pursuers had blundered into what was plain to see—for Osana. I felt a warm glow of pride in her; thankfulness that she had chosen to go our way. We would have been dead long before, of one threat or another, had it not been for Osana.

But even this fortunate incident did not turn aside the pursuit.

As we emerged from the thick bush into a clearer, higher area of forest, and as my breath began to come less harshly in my throat—I heard the cry of an ocelot from before us. The call was taken up oddly by a parrot and squawked off through the jungle, and was answered by another and another cat-scream in the distance. Instantly I knew our goose was cooked, for that so many wild cats had assembled by chance was impossible.

From behind the great trees in our path there stepped out now before us warrior after warrior, arrows on nock or spears held ready, their painted faces grimacing triumph. I called out to the Spaniards:

"Stand and take it! If we run, they will enjoy shooting us down, if we stand—this Ah Kin Kutz may hold us for ransom from Cortez or some other Spanish captain."

CHAPTER II

PRODDED through the forest at the ends of the feathered war-spears, we were a weary, sorry and despairing group. It was a long chance any of us would be ransomed and until we knew from Osana that the custom of this Indian nation was to work all captives as slaves—when they were not sacrificed occasionally to their Gods. That meant a life-time of drudgery with the altar and the sacrificial knife always to be waited for with dread—even if it did not in time become a longed for gate of

deliverance from toil.

We were led before Ah Kin Kutz. He was a fat rascal regally attired and very much the King, if by King you mean an enjoyment of his power that was a lust on his greasy face. Osana held herself proudly, scornfully, and we took our cue from her, which may or may not have been wise. She had a nation behind her, we were to Ah Kin Kutz but Spaniards, and by his talk, much of which I understood, Spaniards were mysterious, newly arrived nobodies who might or might not be able to pay for our release.

This was the city of Xamancana, and this was the King of the country several days marching distance in any direction.

Xamancana had once been a much greater city, was in its decline. It was evident to me why it had declined—for nearly every able-bodied man was in war-paint and carried himself with a warrior's swagger. It is a knowledge soon acquired by one who contacts soldiers of whatever color or breed—soldiers don't work—won't work—and prefer to do anything but work. Xamancana seemed to me to be a city which suffered from a familiar ailment—the habit of going to war.

The ancient city was still glorious, though, to my eyes. This habit of not working and preferring to fight must have been recently acquired by the people of Xamancana, for every inch of the rocks of which the city was built was covered with inscriptions, carvings, bas-reliefs and lavish pictographs.

Each building stood on a mound, making them seem of impressive height, though in truth all were of one story. When the race of Mayas want a two storied building they build a higher mound behind the first and put another building on it, making the whole look

like a two storied building. Xamancana was like that. The wood of the buildings was also like the stone,—covered with carvings, and the carvings painted in brilliant colors. It was still beautiful, impressive in a way no European city ever achieved—yet it was in decay. The paint was faded and disappearing from the hardwood lintels and high elaborate wooden combs of the steep roofs.

Xamancana was well furnished with slaves, in fact all the work was done by slaves, as we soon learned. We ground corn, we planted the fields, we harvested the corn, and always the Chilam's, the priests, shuffled by and peered at us calculatingly—wondering when we would be brought before them. I was sincerely glad we were not in Aztec hands. The Aztecs find an excuse for sacrifice every day, the Mayans only three or four times a year—and then only if the portents of war or other trouble seem to call for divine intercession in their affairs.

I would have enjoyed learning a great deal more of these curious people, for they were a cheerful lot, not at all bad when one knew and understood them. And not at all in love with their King Ah Kin Kutz, who drafted their youths from the productive labor of the fields to send them out to make captives for his slave pens and to provide richer captives for whom he might collect ransom. Ah Kin Kutz may have thought he was a great racketeer, I don't know. But he seemed to me merely the product of a long line of decadent monarchs who had brought Xamancana from the heights to the lowly and dying state it was now in. This process had probably gone on for centuries before we Spaniards came.

I WOULD have enjoyed studying these people, perhaps even starting

a movement to upset the tables upon Ah Kin Kutz, and it could easily have been done—but that happened which ended my slavery.

Osana, who lived in the great house of the King's women, and waited upon them, sent a messenger to me one day where I worked in the field. This was unusual and I wondered how she came to have authority for such freedom of action. I followed the swarthy, bow-legged little man she had sent me, and the sun of Osana's smile broke upon me at last. I had not seen her even from the distance for days.

"Oh, my Zalo, at last my father has sent for me! Ah Kin Kutz is satisfied, his greedy soul has been appeased by gold, and I am going home!"

"I am glad for you, dear little Princess. But I am sorry for me, to see you no more!"

"That is why I sent for you. I have talked nicely to the big, fat Ah Kin Kutz, and have begged him to let you go with me! He does not like the idea, for he is very stingy. So I told him I would refuse to go, and then my papa would take back his gold and copper and silver, and would think Ah Kin Kutz was a liar and did not have me here—and would declare war, thinking Ah Kin Kutz had allowed something to happen to me."

"What did he say to that?"

"He laughed at me. But he wants to send me home in good humor; it may save him trouble later. So, he is sending you along as a return gift to my father. It is a custom, and a ransom is always called a *gift*, for the sake of being polite. And a gift calls for a return, and the little bit of work you may do here is no loss to Ah Kin Kutz—he considers it a very good bargain. You are going home with me?"

"You are asking me? Of course, if it can be done!"

"We start tomorrow. The warriors will lead us until they sight the warriors of Chetumal. Then they will stand afar off while we go in to meet them. That is so they are not attacked. Once he has me back safely, my father may be very angry with Ah Kin Kutz. But I will explain that he was not to blame in the beginning, and there will be no war."

"War is not good, little one. You are a wise girl, a good girl. If I was a somebody here in this strange country, I would ask you something very important. But me, I am a nobody—I am a nothing."

"That is *your* opinion. But you are really a very great person from across the big waters, and when you find out what you are in Chetumal, you may change your mind. I have plans for you, you large ungainly animal. . . ."

She called me this last in a strange Indian word that I did not quite understand but that is what I thought it was. I said:

"I am only a lowly sailorman. Never could I become worthy of a Princess."

"When we get to Chetumal, you will make no such stupid statement. You will say you are a great warrior from the other side of the earth—and they will look up to you! Do you understand?"

"I understand, little Princess. But it seems a very big lie."

It was not such a big lie as I thought. I knew a great deal more about war than the natives of Chetumal, I realized as I heard them discussing the Spanish and their thunder-and-lightning weapons, their horses that were "Gods," their "impenetrable" magic armor. I laughed at them.

"You are children—" I shouted at them. "These Spanish are exactly like myself, their armor is made of metal, not even well made.—Their horses are

only big llamas; they themselves are stupid, greedy men whom you would not spit upon if you knew them well. Never let me hear you say they are Gods!"

This was on the way to the great city of Chetumal, on the bay of the sea where her father reigned over thousands of warriors and homes and thousands of acres of land that was rich and well cared for. The warriors who led the way looked back respectfully at me, and I knew how to talk from then on. It is strange how such things can mark the future course of a man's life.

One of the warriors left the ranks of our guards and walked beside me.

"You are the first of these bearded white men we have seen here in Chetumal. You are the first I have ever heard of that could talk the language of the Indians. And I hear you say the men of Malinche (Cortez) are only mortals, and that their armor is not filled with magic that stops all arrows. How is it that you talk so of your people?"

"I have no great love for my people." I love any *good* man, hate any *bad* man. Indians are not all bad, Spaniards are not all good. I love whom I love, and that is always those who treat me best!"

The warrior walked on beside me in thought saying little, thinking much. I did not know till later he was a chief, a man of much respect among the Chetumals.

"We could make armor of metal, but it would be so heavy one could not leap away from a spear!"

"If your breast is shielded with metal, you do not *need* to leap from a spear."

He looked at me sidewise, calculatingly. "It is their sharp swords we fear the most. They seem a more deadly weapon than our own maquahuitls and spears and arrows. It is their thunder-

sticks that throw death which one fears even before one is close to the death."

"THESE things are no more to be feared than sharp arrows. In my country they fear a crossbow bolt more than a bullet. The bolts are barbed, and the wound festers."

"If you were an Indian, how could you meet an attack by these Spaniards?"

It was my turn to look at him calculatingly. "I am not an Indian!" I said with a cool laugh.

He grinned. Walking very near me was little princess Osana, her eyes demure, but her bearing proud, her step light and happy, she was going home after such long fear of being forever deprived of the happiness of being near those she loved. He said, that too-sharp Indio—

"If I am any judge, that will be a thing soon remedied. Then we will see, what we will see!"

I smiled back at him, for the idea that had entered his mind had been in my own for well over a year, if my judgment of days was good. For Osana to be happy, I would have laid down much more than my pride in being Spanish. And she seemed happiest when I was around, chaffing her, or just watching her graceful self doing one of the many tasks Indian maidens have always to be doing, even a princess like herself.

CHAPTER III

CHETUMAL was a great city, and I was glad to see no sign of the decay that had been so evident in the other Mayan cities in which I had stopped. Ah Kin Kutz' Xamancana had been half in ruins, half depeopled by past wars or raids, and obviously not growing. Here they were building

new structures, the carving of the building stones was going on every day—the processes of life were full and fecund and bustling—Chetumal was not a dying city. The great roof comose reared proudly above the massive carved stones of the buildings, bright as new paint—it was fresh new paint applied yearly—in gaudy but somehow lovely colors they made out of plant juices, out of sea animals—out of a dozen strange things such as ground blue rocks from the hills.

Everywhere screamed and ran and laughed the little red children, bandy-legged and happy, with fat little stomachs full of maize and deer meat. Chetumal was prosperous, and as our procession wound through the great ways of the city, the people crowded close to see the strange white man with the black beard—and to welcome their Princess Osana with many cries of happiness. I was reminded forcibly of the superiority of this clean bright city over the filthy and gloomy warrens of Spain. There the streets are so narrow two horses can hardly pass; and if they do, some one throws the slops down on you for shaking their house with your mount's rump. Always in the gutters lie the drunkards, and always on the doorsteps are the ragged and diseased beggars, the importunate strumpets, the corruption that drives a sailor quickly back to the clean bright sea.

Chetumal was not like that! Chetumal was full of healthy people, and I cursed mentally the fate that had brought the Spanish to the new World after the Red Gold of the Red Men.

I remembered when the first red man was led through Cordoba by a rope around his neck—tied to a horse's tail. He was not welcomed as I am welcomed here—no! These people look respectfully and quietly at me and murmur sagely to each other about the

stranger from a strange land. My country-men had thrown clods and filth at the red man from across the sea—had cursed the "savage," had tried to kill him with stones, so that the exhibition was abandoned. I *liked* these people and this town of Chetumal. I had never liked towns or people before—which is why I had turned again and again to sailing though my aptitudes could easily have gotten me better paying work ashore.

The aged father of Osana welcomed her with tears in his eyes, stepping down from the great stone platform on which his wooden throne stood—glorious in his feathered robes and his jeweled headgear, glorious in his golden breastplate with the rays of the sun surrounding the jeweled disc—and glorious too in the dignified age and white hairs of him. A man, a simple man, a kind and loving man, his tears made my own eyes wet. I felt proud that I might have helped in some small way in bringing Osana safely through the terrible jungles—though in truth it was the other way around.

THE proud warriors all went down on one knee before the aged dignity of their King, and something pressed my own knee to the ground—though at home in Spain when Ferdinand appeared I had gone into the wine shop to keep from taking off my hat as the slavish habit was. This king was a different matter entirely!

Weeks went by. I was treated like visiting royalty; richly robed princes of the blood hung on my words, entertained me with hunting forays into the jungle—but somehow I was kept separated from the facts of life, from the mechanisms of social life of Chetumal. This condition might have remained to the end of my days, for I had no intention of leaving the safety of the City

for the raw death waiting in a thousand forms between me and any kind of life I could cope with—had not little Osana taken a hand. She came up to me where I sat in my gorgeously beaded apron, with my limbs painted in the latest mode—with the honorary tattos fresh on my flanks, fresh red and blue and green inks rioted beautifully under my skin, these days! For the tattoo artists, urged on by my enthusiasm for their patterns, so different from the wishy washy ships and anchors of my sea-going companions—had given me the works—She came up to me smiling, her little hands fluttering like two love-birds about to light, her deer-skin skirt moulding her thighs as no silk-covered, bustled and puffy European dress ever did for Spanish señoritas' legs—her high pointed breasts bare and innocent and utterly enslaving to a poor sailor's eyes.—Osana said—though I could hardly listen for adoring her:

"I have talked with my father many times concerning you and what may become of you. You cannot leave here to join your people, and you do not appear to have any great love for the Spanish ways—we have heard much about their ways, you know. We have understood that you are not like other Spaniards."

"Osana, when a man gets tattooed with the fearful face of Itzamma, the sky god, upon his back, he is not interested in returning to the sway of the Spanish Inquisition! They would *flay* this "heathen abomination" off my back piecemeal. When a sailor gets the Plumed Serpent, Kukulcan, engraved upon his chest in glorious red and blue and green, with feathers and scroll complete—he is not interested in Spanish art. And to top it, let me show you the masterpiece of these masters of the art of Tattoo—the design I had them do especially for me. I had it placed

where no one would ever see it but yourself."

I removed the beaded collar which is standard among men in Chetumal, and underneath was—can you guess? Yes, a heart, and within the heart was the face of Osana, and the Indian words that mean—"the only girl I ever loved."

Osana clapped her hands with delight. "Is that true? On, my man from the sea!" She threw her arms around my neck and kissed me. My nose was well rubbed by hers, for that is the kiss among the Indians. "But Kukulcan will be angry with you to place my face above his image. Are you sure it is wise?"

"He should be *honored*! Besides it is *my* skin, and I will have there what I please."

"It is unorthodox, but very very nice! *EEEE, it is nice*, to see my face written on your skin, like the Goddess-face is carved in the stone. It is so wonderful a thing. I should like my father to see it!"

"Ah, Osana, that had better wait till later. Now, what was it you started to tell me when you came, and got interrupted by the art exhibit?"

"MY FATHER has decided that you might wish to become one of us, to marry and settle down, and he has provided that you are to learn our ways of war. Because of your greatness, and because of your knowledge of these warring Spaniards who may even now be sending men to loot our temples of gold and to enslave us as they have other peoples—he has provided that you are to be a war-chief. But a war-chief must be a man tried in many battles—and my father is the only one who can get around such rules. So he wants to talk to you—about that and certain other things—our marriage

—and war!

"Marriage? War! What do you mean?"

"Some Spaniards have learned of our city—and are making their way to us across the mountains. My father wants to ask you what to do. And I have spoken to him about marrying. I told him I would marry no-one but you, and if he wanted grand-children he had better do something about it!"

So it was that I went up to Nachan-can, King of the great land of Chetumal, and my knees had quite as much trouble each with the other as any bridegrooms-about-to-be when approaching a father-in-law-to-be.

The old man was reclining upon a great couch of carved wood, the blonde leather slung from the four corners was elaborately decorated with little birds, I noticed absently. A small brown maiden fanned the old man with a great feather fan, and he smoked a long pipe of black stone, sculptured in the shape of a devil's head. He motioned me to a seat near at hand, and lay for a long time looking at me calmly and quizzically.

"My son, that time I have feared for long has come—the bearded bearers of thunder-and-lightning, the men of Malinche, the conqueror of the great Aztec nation—approach across the mountains that have protected us this long!"

"I have feared this time for all of my friends, too, my father. And I have thought long upon it. I can save you—if. . . ."

"You can save us, my son? Are you sure? These terrible warriors have vanquished the greatest nations with ease—the Empire of Montezuma fell before them within days of fighting. How can Chetumal fight off such warriors?"

"They are few, they come far. There are ways of dealing with them. But I

can not tell you so well as I could show you."

"What are you trying to say, O strange man from across waters unknown to Red Men. Do not fear to open your mind."

"Once, O father of a nation, I was a sailor upon a ship. The ship was wrecked! If I had been captain of the ship, it would *not* have been wrecked. But a sailor can not tell a captain how a ship is to be sailed!"

"Neither can I make you captain of this ship, my son."

"You can make me the war-chief. Then I can train your warriors quickly, and they would have to obey. I cannot save you otherwise."

"Two things stand in the way of that. I have thought long upon this, watched you, even had you spied upon by men whom I trust. I have found no fault in you. My daughter, Osana, speaks very highly of you. You have been made a member of our nation—but you have not been tried in battle. And no man who has not been tried in battle has ever been made a war-chief. Only heroes of great courage are given such honor!"

"Then, for the sake of your people, I had better be a hero! For, without me, your warriors will fall before the weapons of the men of Malinche. The Spanish soldiers will drive your warriors before them like sheep!"

"What you say may all be true enough, but still . . . I do not see how this custom can be circumvented. The warriors would be consumed with anger that a man untried in battle should be made chief over them in battle. . . . Too, Osana loves you. Do you love my daughter?"

"I love her dearly, O King Nacham-can. But I have not said so because I am still a nobody in many ways. And she is your daughter!"

"Yourself must have some idea how

these difficulties may be surmounted?"

"Give me but two hundred men. Send me to turn back these invaders before they even reach the borders of our land. Then when I return—victorious—I will be a hero. Osana can be given to me in marriage. You can make me war-chief in gratitude for driving back the terrible warriors with the thundersticks and the four legged beasts that breathe out fire. It is very simple."

"Yes, it is simple. Provided you come back alive. But I do not wish to send you to your death!"

"O King, do I fear that you do not know how to rule your land? Then do not fear that I do not know what is my business. I have seen war and war-making on the other shores of the ocean. I know how it is done. These armored and confident Spaniards can be turned back so easily—if only one is not afraid to attack. The trouble with the Indians has been that they have waited to be attacked. The Spaniards pick the time, the place, of course they win. This time it will be different."

"May Kinich-Kakmo, the fire-bird, grant you success. My son, be careful. We have learned to have affection for you. It will not be the same without the bearded stranger to talk about. . . ."

"I will bring you a dozen llama-loads of Spanish helmets to mount outside the palace. Give me my warriors, and I will give you victory!"

The old man slowly inscribed upon a bit of deer-hide some strange glyphs.

"Take this to the war-chief, Hun-Chuk Kun. He will give you whatever you require for this expedition. Hunabku go with you, my son."

AS I LIFTED the painted hide curtain to leave the chamber, I stumbled against a soft figure. Osana straightened from where she had been listening, and threw her arms about my

neck.

"O 'Zalo! Take me with you! You will be killed, and I will not be there to help you."

"I will not do that! But I will hurry back to marry you, and you had better get ready, for I have waited a long, long time."

"I am not very much afraid for you, in truth. I can see what you think inside your big hollow head, and you know just what to do to these strange enemies, don't you?"

"My head is not hollow, and you cannot see inside!"

"You know, father is very glad that you are not afraid of Malinche's men. He weeps, alone, at night, for what will become of his people when the Spanish come here for gold. He will be very glad to have you for a son-in-law. He wanted me to persuade you to go and drive them off."

"The old faker! He let me think it was my own idea!"

"He is very cunning that way. And he always gets what he wants. He has decided you would make a very good son-in-law, since the Spanish will arrive soon, and kill us all anyway."

"Well, if I can put some savagery into these sweet young "savages" of yours, all will be well. But they are hardly my idea of blood-thirsty warriors. We will find out. They are usually much too interested in pleasure and music, and too uninterested in killing other men. To get rid of Spaniards when the gold lust is in them you *have* to kill them. I have not seen any blood flow since I have been in this city."

"Perhaps they will listen to you, knowing they will be defeated most certainly if they do not listen."

"I will make them listen. After all, if I succeed, I will get you to wife—and become the War-chief as well. It is a prize I intend to win."

"Which?" asked Osana. "Me or the title?"

I took her golden, lithe body in my arms and gazed a long time into her wise yet innocent eyes. After a time she said: "Alright. I know which you prize most. Be very careful, my big white God, and come back to me. I will make you very happy—you do not know how I will love you. Not like your *Senoritas* across the sea—not for money or for a breadwinner—not anyway could you get what I have in store for you!"

"I'll be back, little Princess!"

While the *Chilam's*, the priests, slid strings of thorns through their tongues, and the musicians made weird ritual music, and the people offered up their prayers to their Gods—I led my small army of greenhorns out to make soldiers of them within days.

For the Spanish were sweeping across the land. The last we heard of Ah Kin Kutz, our nearest neighbor, he was dickering with them for the ransom of myself and the other surviving Spaniard. That fellow had not been worked to death yet by the cruel slave-owners of his kingdom. But he was a particularly hardy man, and young, and such die hard.

THEN we heard no more of Ah Kin Kutz. That meant a great deal, for these Indians keep up a steady interchange of information and goods. One can buy copper weapons from the North American continent in the bazaars—the beadwork of the Pacific coast tribes finds its way there, and where the *Emeralds* go that are carried out by the traders no man could trace. Ah Kin Kutz probably got the bow-string about his neck about the time he figured he was closing a deal with the wily Spanish—wily and treacherous

beyond such poor chicanery as Ah Kin Kutz'. None of Cortez crew ever gave up good red gold for any promise to a heathen like Ah Kin Kutz.

"Men." I stood before this heathen crew, and looked them over, as they did myself. I looked as weird and fierce as any of them, with my tattooed skin, my feathered *h e a d d r e s s*, my quilted armor and bronze headed axe, my face painted in alternate red and black stripes.

"Men, there is one advantage you have over the Spanish troops." Good warriors they looked, a little too sleek with soft living and good food, but young and quick and clever. I had picked them with care and they included all my friends among the nation of the *Chetumals*. "You can fight in the jungle, it is natural to you. If Ah Kin Kutz had attacked the Spanish in the jungle instead of inviting them into his city—he would have saved us the job we are going to do. They have to get out in the open to make the most of their horse, their armor, and their swords. Likewise their powder and ball are not accurate in the forest, but require a level plain, good seeing distance, and a chance to volley into a mass of men to be really effective. So far as hurting anyone, the white-man's-lightning will not strike you if you don't bunch up and let them get a shot at a big target. So, we are going to stick to jungle fighting—and in the few days remaining until the Spanish get here—we are going to study this ground we have selected—and rehearse the battle over and over till every man knows his part."

These Indians are simple people, things do not occur to them easily. But once I demonstrated to them where a Spanish soldier is armored, and where a spear is most likely to pierce without hindrance, they remembered. There

would be no stone spear heads broken on Spanish armor, that was certain. And few arrows would bounce off that armor, either.

These Indians could hit a jaguar in the eye at fifty paces—and a Spaniard has eyes, too. But they had to be told to shoot at the face, the knees, the shoulder joints and neck. Else they would have picked out the bright glitter of the armor as their target. When the arrow bounced harmlessly off, they would call it "Magic," and give up and run. But I fixed that with hard words and repeated demonstrations. They knew a Spaniard could be killed—they had seen (and heard) me being tattooed! I had not kept an Indian's stoic calm in the process!

Asked why I made such a racket from such a little pain, I had explained that I was singing in Spanish. Which was taken as a great joke, a supreme humorist. They are polite, the men of Chetumal.

CHAPTER IV

"**A**H, FOR the cool wind from Cordoba's hills." Captain Ricardo Montez, leading his own company toward the loot of Chetumal, mopped his brow and surveyed the jungle with a jaundiced eye. The horses were fagged, the bush grew ever thicker, and the way was not the easy route they had been led to believe.

"But," he went on, half to himself, and half to his friend, Juan Poretina, "if this Guerrero is willing to give up his chances of Spanish succor for the sake of the gold, there must be a great plenty of it."

"Of course," Juan Poretina was sure of it—"why else would he turn down Cortez' offer than to keep the gold for himself. Being a sailor, he has sent word to his own people in Spain by

some means, and awaits their arrival. Why else should a man refuse rescue?"

"Why else, indeed? It is the best assurance we have that this trip will not be fruitless. If the city looks too strong, we will send for Cortez. 'Twill be a rich haul."

In a single line on the narrow trail were some twenty horse and steel clad riders, and behind them some eighty foot soldiers, sweating and weary with the long trail. Ever this valley plunged deeper into the hot lands of the coast, and they thought regretfully of the cool plateaus of the inland mountainous region they had left behind. Now the ground began to rise again, but the jungle was thicker, the trail more indistinguishable, the heat more oppressive. There was something ominous about the quiet of these forests, when all was still, it meant some great beast of prey stalked, or hunters lay in wait for the kill, or that a tribe of savage cannibals were on the trail of food—lay in wait ahead to leap upon them with savage cries and shrieks and painted faces grimacing. This quiet, they knew enough of the jungle to know it meant no good.

'Zalo, sweating in the shadow of a thicket some yards off the trail, swore softly. "So, because I do not choose to come when Cortez whistles, that means there is gold I wish to keep for myself—and they send these newly weaned adventurers to get me—and the gold."

'Zalo had prepared the ambush with care, for it was his first venture as a warrior, and he knew how sadly the Indians had failed everywhere to defeat the Spanish. If this ambush failed, his standing in the community would depend solely on his relationship to Osana and not on his own prowess. His future was at stake here, whether a man on his feet and free—or a chattel of some

Spanish overlord, and his Indians the same—his Osana a plaything of Spanish soldiery, probably. He had seen too much of their ways to expect anything—and as for the gold—whoever had a claim to it had also a foot in the grave. He wanted none of that scramble of death around the loot that he had seen before. 'Zalo preferred his Indians to the gold-mad Spanish military.

THERE is terrifying sensing, a smell about the Spanish horse and foot, a terrible singleness of purpose about them, like automatons of destruction, tramping steadily on through the jungle toward the relatively peaceful and light-hearted life of Chetumal. 'Zalo swore to himself as he sensed this peculiar ant-army one-ness of the Spaniards,—sensed likewise the fearful agitation of his Indians, their inability to see that there was more at stake than their own lives—that two opposed systems of life were here meeting in a clash that would not end, no matter the outcome—that these systems would clash now and forever—that the men were but puppets moved by the strange strings of race needs—of race differences—of the utter opposition of their separate ways of life.

But 'Zalo had no time for that. He remembered that his mind had been full of such imaginative interpretations of nature the night the Estelita had ripped her bottom out on a reef. Right now he must, for the sake of his future happiness with Osana, drive these white brothers of his back into the limbo of distance from which they had come. Sharply 'Zalo shouted his orders—

"Keep hidden from their fire—and keep them running. Once they give way, and turn back along the trail—keep after them! Let none escape to carry the tale to Cortez—for if he knows not where the defeat—he knows

not where to send his revenge. Attack! And do not stop—kill! Kill!"

The Spanish, hearing the sudden cries about them, taken suddenly by sharp flights of arrows from the brush lining the trail—reared back on their horses, searching for some sign of the enemy—and even as they looked and saw nothing upon which to charge—man after man fell to earth with an arrow in his throat—in his arm pit—in the knee joints—wherever the bright steel did not cover them—there 'Zalo's Indians sent their shafts with deadly accuracy.

Montez, already bleeding from a throat wound—shouted—"On—ride on—out of this ambush!"

The score of horses, now but fifteen, leaped under the spurs, and galloped ahead along the narrow trail—which was a tunnel of bright sunlight between the terrible green walls of the living jungle. No place for a horse to leave the trail and seek the enemy to trample him, no place to swing a sword once off that trail—and no enemy upon the trail for a warrior to strike.

The foot soldiers, now kneeling in ranks, fired steadily into the green—trying to find a mark to shoot at. Crossbows and muskets are not a match for the simple bow in such fighting—they take too long to load, and they must have a target that stays put long enough to sight at. Not so a bow; experienced hands slid shaft to nock, bent the brown wood back, the string hummed, and another Spaniard died—before he had even finished winding his crossbow windlass. When one did get ready to fire—only a sudden terrible painted face that disappeared before he could bring his weapon to shoulder. The undefeated Spaniards had met an enemy that did not fight their way! On the open plains of Mexico, Cortez had been supreme, in the streets of Tenochtitlan

his experience in street fighting had made it easy to vanquish a superior enemy—but here, in the jungle, the Indian was superior. Because he knew it—and was ready—under 'Zalo Guerrero. These Chetumal Indians had listened for many days to the talk of this 'Zalo, and they knew as well as they knew the palms of their hands just how the Spaniards had whipped the mighty Montezuma's warriors, and why the Indians had failed to keep their land. Their anger and their love of freedom 'Zalo had built upon, picturing what had become of those Mexican Indians under the Spaniards—and they did not wish that to happen here.

So it was that when at last Ricardo Montez turned his horse in the trail and started back to rescue his foot, thrashing out into the twining green tangle to seek out the hidden, steadily stinging death—maquahuitls whirled behind each horse, and swift brown shadows leaped along behind the struggling horse, sharp obsidian blades fell axe-like upon the great tendons of the legs, and ham-strung horses fell screaming to the vine trampled jungle floor, only to be swarmed over by grim little brown men, not two-thirds as heavy as the Spaniards but terrible in their ferocity. The dying Spanish troops wondered where the gentle, hard-to-anger Indians they had heard of in the Mayan regions before had gone—and where these battle-wise devils had sprung from. These troops, who had ridden with Cortez against the most feared of all Indian troops—the Aztecs themselves—had not seen such ferocity—such lack of fear and awe of Spanish steel. These did not ask their God's forgiveness when they were forced to spill Spanish blood. Something was wrong, the old awe and fear which had always made conquest easy for them was suddenly replaced, here, by a ter-

rible organized anger. A bloodlust unappeasable seemed to activate these red "children of nature."

I, 'Zalo Guerrero, squatted far back in the shadows, watching the "Bearded Gods" die like ordinary mortals. I ticked off the last screaming horse on my fingers as my Chetumal friends, changed into savage, capable warriors by my work, swarm over the carcass. The bloody maquahuitls swung furiously as they smashed the last of the heavily armored riders into a bloody pulp.

The remaining force would not be difficult to dispose of, Spanish cavalry has always been superior to their foot. I could not feel remorseful, for I knew what would have happened to these people had the victory been Spanish.

This Captain, "Montez," his friend had called him, seemed to have been another like Valdivia, apt to take things for granted. Lucky for Cortez that he had seen fit to send a subordinate, scouting force to the little known city of Chetumal. Lucky for me and for Osana, too.

I waved my hand to the warriors, now many of them standing in plain sight of myself and the few remaining Spaniards. The Spanish were half lying, half kneeling among their own corpses. Obediently my warriors fanned out along and across the back trail. None should escape to bring Cortez and other soldiers, raving back here for revenge.

One of the "guest" chiefs, squatting in now respectful attention near me, I sent for a living Spaniard from among the wounded. The dying man was dragged to me. Over his body I could see a wave of feathered shouting warriors swarming over the last of the resistance in the trail. The battle was ended.

I grinned cheerfully at him. I had seen that beefy face before, some years before.

"Not the gaudy, glad-handed reception you expected, was it, treacherous dog?"

Juan Correra, known as Juan of the Big-Belly among the soldiers, looked up at me with stricken, blurring eyes. He summoned his strength, cursed me weakly. "Todos los santos! If I had but slit your throat that time . . ."

"You would now be in better health. Exactly. But you had not the courage, nor the ability."

"I wondered what could have got into these heathens—the Devil himself could not have made them fight a cannier fight. So it's you, a renegade bilgerat from a Spanish ship. What turned you against God and your ruler?"

"You can't imagine that for yourself, can you, O belly of a man?"

"Aye, you could have reasons enough to hate Spain. But it seems a rotten thing to kill white men for the sake of these dirty heathens."

"I intend to marry one of these dirty heathens, and a fine girl she is, too. Too good for the sport of such as you. How many were with you, Juan?"

"A hundred twenty in all, but we lost twenty to that Ah Kin Kutz."

"And your captain was prepared to spend twenty more to get the gold of Chetumal, and you were fool enough to go along and hope you came out lucky? Is that it?"

"Cortez ordered us to look it over, and we did not intend an attack unless it looked easily done."

"So Cortez himself is in Xamancana! That is news!"

"Nay, he is in Tuulum. We communicated by runners, as you must know."

"How about having one of those red sawbones patch me up, like a good fel-

low?"

"By the looks of you, your worries are over. But I'll ask my friends about it."

I TURNED from the beefy form of the dying man. As I did so, several large black insects swarmed up my bare shins. I slapped at them thoughtlessly, was rewarded with hot pincers in several places. I let a series of whoops out that equalled the Chetumals' most impressive war-shouts.

Around me I heard other, similar cries from the Chetumals. Then a cry—

"The army of ants! They come! Flee! Flee!"

Thus an insect accomplished what the bravo's of New Spain had been unable to do—and the future war-chief of Chetumal and his victorious army fled in confusion from the army of little warriors—the army ant.

Hours later we came back to pick up the pieces left behind. We found little of the recent scene of battle and death and victory but stripped trees, skeletal and white—and the five score ghastly, staring skeletons of the Spanish soldiers and their horses. Not a shred of flesh remained upon their bones.

I stood for a long time looking upon the skeletons, and an idea born of the grisly sight grew within me. I gave some orders the Indians thought very strange. We carefully picked up all the bones, in marked bundles carried them back to Chetumal with us. I was going to have a great use for those dead Spaniards. Even for their torn and bloodied uniforms.

In Chetumal my returning band of now subtly different warriors were welcomed with a vastly different respect than had been ours when we had left. We had beaten off the undefeated Spaniards, we had saved the homeland, and the people of Chetumal were patheti-

cally and ecstatically grateful. It was pleasant to me in the extreme, especially when I was ushered by many flower-strewing children up the likewise flower laden walks of the city, past the grinning and cheering crowds of now quite naturally nude people—past the rich two storied mansions of the nobles, past the holy of Holies—the temple, up to the great palace stairs flanked by the scowling stone Plumed Serpents, and up to where old Nachancan, the Chetumal King and father of Osana, waited with the chaplet of quetzal feathers that were for my head—for the man who knew how to fight the Spaniards and win. I bowed my knee reverently, and somehow the tears that glistened on my eyelashes glistened also on his.

They were tears of thankfulness that this pleasant city was still free from the grinding overlords who were making of all Mexico one blood strewn slave-pen. I had retrieved the life-work of this old man from certain destruction, and in his grandiose priestly jargon, so different from the speech of the common citizens, he made me feel the gratitude of these red men and women. After his short speech, which was heard and cheered and softly wept over by the people, he turned and held out one hand to someone approaching up the long stone stairs, stairs so gaudily and yet so grandly decorated with painted carvings, with bas reliefs of the innumerable Gods and Goddesses of the Mayan pantheon. It was such a strange sensation for a Spaniard, who had never expected anything better than black bread and beans and a shrewish wife to cook them, to be here, second man of a great kingdom—walking forward to greet my betrothed—a Princess as beautiful as any white girl could hope to be. I quietly swore to myself that if human ingenuity could do it, no

Spaniard would ever cross the borders of Chetumal and live to tell of it.

OSANA, glorious in green feathered cloak, under which glittered and winked a turquoise mosaic collar, under which her bare breasts just managed to peep out and say—I am young, pure beauty—and I am yours. Her lithe, slender waist was belted with the blue turquoise mosaic, worked into little birds with ruby wings, from which a transparent white skirt of the finest weave I had seen in Chetumal sheathed her truly perfect hips and supple shapely legs in a mist that only added to their copper perfection. She was a bride worth every effort, and I intended to let nothing happen between me and the winning of this woman for life.

Old Nachancan put our hands each into the other, and looked up into the blue sky that is the body and breath of Hunabku calling down his blessing and a dozen others out of the sky, looking down as if into earth, he blessed us with all the great and mighty Gods of the Underworld—a group of Gods in whom I put more faith than those who live in the nothingness above. They seem closer and solidier.

The Chilams shuffled out from a row behind Nachancan, each strewing drops of water, or bits of flower petals, or powdered bone, or shredded feathers—which offering to each God, Chac-Mool the water, the Plumed Serpent, Kukulcan, and as each God received his offering of Holy Matter from the Chilam's hands, I felt as the others felt—that there was more to this God business than one met on the face of it. But that is as far as religion ever got with me.

I took Osana in my arms and rubbed her nose with mine, the people cheered, the women wept with joy, and everyone was happy. Only fly in my ointment—

Osana would not be mine, now, for another month—for that was the Sacred period of Purification—as if Osana could be more “purified” by all the priests’ work in the world. And in a month or less, Cortez would be thundering across the plains to look for his lost regiment. Life has been just such a series of waiting for things, for me. But Osana was happy, the people were happy, and old Nachancan was ecstatic. I followed him into the ornate palace, to tell him of the expedition and how the victory had been achieved. Osana followed us demurely, as lovely as an angel in her glittering feathers and blue shining girdle and gleaming copper skin—her smile a kind of music about me, her eyes a kind of irresistible magnet for my own.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS a busy month later that I looked out from a long platform among the tall jungle trees, high above the ground,—out across the shallow river that separates the land of the Chetumals from the land of Xaman-cana.

I had worked hard to get ready for the troop of horses I saw splashing across the ford. My heart leaped as I saw, under the banner of Cortez, not Cortez himself, but another. For what I planned might have been undone by the hard head of Cortez.

After the horse came scrambling and cursing the hard bitten Spanish foot, a column stretching on across the water and out of sight beyond. There was, in sight, near a thousand of them, I guessed, and more coming. This little ruse had better work, though I doubted not the ability of my now better trained and vastly larger force to defeat them.*

I lowered the golden wires I held, and a sigh of fear, a gasp of fright, a

babble of wondering words arose from the approaching Spanish column. I nodded my head, and along the long platform, stretching off into the trees, my red skinned friends also moved the strings of golden wire as I had trained them. That had been a task, to make puppeteers out of ignorant Indians. But, like children, they are precocious and learn readily once they understand.

Below me, the bones of Ricardo Montez, mounted upon the bones of his mount, moved along step by step. I walked toward the Spanish troops along my unseen platform among the jungle giant’s branches, and below me the ghost of Captain Montez moved, visible and frightening, his horse moving its legs as though alive. The skeleton peered at them from under the gleaming helmet, above the skeleton’s head fluttered the torn banner of Montez, and behind him moved the other mounted skeletons, not so skillfully, but still with all the appearance of animation that is the skillful puppeteer’s art.

**ED. NOTE.—Fire-arms of Cortez’ troops. In Life Magazine of Dec. 16, ’46 in an article on the digging up of Cortez’ bones in Mexico City, there is an illustration of Cortez’ men in armor fighting the Aztecs apparently at the gates of Tenochtitlan.*

One of the captions states that Cortez troops numbered but 950, and that they were equipped only with arquebuses. But the picture, which is said to be an “old” picture, shows a soldier with an intricately designed musket in his hand. It is possible both are right, that Cortez carried a few of the existant muskets to discharge for effect, did his principal fighting with the arquebus.

Prescott gives Cortez six heavy cannon from the ships, and a larger number of small brass cannon, presumably packed on horse-back.

His soldiers were equipped with several types of muskets, as well as arquebuses.

Enc. Brit. places the first fire-arms in use in Europe two centuries before Cortez birth. These were small cylinders mounted on sticks. From these the match-lock developed during those two centuries—well developed.

It is quite possible that some of the heavy match-locks were jettisoned on the long marches in favor of the lighter cross-bow, with or without the Commander’s consent. Did you ever heft one?

The Spanish stopped their horses upon the golden sands of the river's shore, peered fearfully at the little show I had arranged for their benefit.

One after another the skeleton band rode, walked or staggered around the big tree in which I was perched—and on into the limbo of the jungle shadows, where they were whisked up and out of the ken of man.

As my own leading skeleton completed his controlled promenade, I dropped the bones on the platform and ran back to see what effect the performance was having.

These men were from the Spain of the Inquisition, and believed firmly in life after death, ghosts, witches and magic. In spite of the shouts and curses of their officers, the men who had already crossed the river rode back into the stream pell mell, did not stop till they were out of sight. Others, not understanding their shouts, kept on coming, but a glimpse of the marching skeletons in armor, weapons gleaming and ragged uniforms still draping their bones—one glimpse and they too turned tail.

We had not half finished our scheduled performance when our audience had walked out on us completely. My Indians were convulsed, and their laughter and cries must have been interpreted by the Spanish as the shrieks of ghosts—for none came to inquire what the cause of the mirth.

"Tonight, as they sleep, we will steal their horses, slit a few throats—and each night thereafter till they are out of reach—we will harass them with death . . ."

THE old chief beside me looked at me oddly, as if to reassure himself about some thought peculiar to himself. He was a friend, but a friend who always seemed amused and amazed at

everything I did, as though I was some rare creature who no one but himself really understood, and even that was a mischance of fortune, and not to be relied upon . . . I was a God, masquerading as a man, or a man, masquerading as a God—one or the other, but in either case, I was an amusing creature. This old chief, grizzled and scarred, shook his head warningly. His words were slow and measured, he was a man who had long carried great responsibilities.

"These fire-eating devils or Cortez will not be easily disposed of, my new war chief. This little play of bones and magic will not long frighten them off. They will return, as soon as the leader can get them under control again."

I knew he was right. But that was really why I ordered the night raid. To reinforce the first scare with a scare that really hurt—the loss of their horses and a few corpses, something to stick in their gizzards properly.

Knowing the natures of these Spanish leaders as well as I did, I knew they would turn their efforts elsewhere if we made it hot enough for them in Maia. At least the area of the Rio Bravo, as the Spanish called this watershed, would be avoided by them.

I had to drive these Indians, make them like battle, teach them to exult in besting the "gods from over the sea." They were quite willing to fight—once. But to pursue and seek battle, to harass and to leave no Spaniard alive where they could get at him—that I had to teach them. Freedom and peace could be won no other way.

Now that my first two brushes with the undefeated enemy had taught them that it could be done—I had to show them and drive them to the last effort possible—and they were ready and willing to follow wherever the "white"

Indian led them. I was now proven—they were ready. And the anger against civilization's worst features, of which I had seen much too much, burned in me consumingly. Chetumal was going to go its own way, unharrassed by priests, Inquisitions, or greedy plunder-mad soldiery.

My army moved that same day along the back trail of the Spanish. Llamas, loaded with arrows, spears and spare axes and maquahuittls, brought up the rear. Far ahead I flung my scouts, a good five hundred expert jungle hunters, the best men in the world for this kind of work. There was no danger of this, my army blundering upon an ambush as had Ricardo Montez and his unlucky followers.

My warriors were a gaudy sight, blazing with scarlet plumes in their headdress, with their quilted armor spotted and striped with paint, their limbs and faces likewise painted with their tribal patterns. This painting usually follows the permanent pattern of the tattoos with which each is religiously decorated. The tattoo process takes a long time, proceeding by stages from the time of puberty to the time of manhood, when the final heroic over all effect is achieved and the man becomes a warrior. After that, he can stand anything.

In my case, I got it all at once! I know! A man must suffer for art's sake is a truth in Maia land.

The gaudy reds and blues overlaid and accentuated this underlying tattoo, bringing out all the intricate spidery tracery with great brilliant highlights and heavily accentuated lines. An experienced man who made a study of this art could tell the tribe and family of a warrior thus bedecked at a distance of a mile or so. Just another reason why I picked night for the time to do our fighting. These warriors were ultra-

visible, and no matter how bad shots the Spaniards are, they could not miss them all, if they ever saw them in the open.

I HAD heard that Indians were silent, morose, given to talking only when vitally necessary. Whoever started that story never lived with the Chetumals. In spite of a command for silence, they chattered volubly and excitedly about everything, but especially about the enemy and what would happen to him when we caught up with him. They seemed to think themselves now invincible, since the Spaniards had fled from my little puppet show of skeletons.

An hour before nightfall, a runner came back from two miles ahead, with word that the enemy was making camp for the night in a dry stream bed. I went forward with him to look over the ground, giving orders for complete silence and concealment. Fortunately they took the situation seriously enough to obey. I could only hope they would continue to obey. These Indians had never known the rigorous and harsh discipline which is the European military life. Most of them had never felt a blow in their life, except in short wars with their neighbors. Except for Ah Kin Kutz' nation of warriors, they had no neighbors able to beat them, and they had taught the Xamancana's to keep off by their use of greater numbers than Ah Kin Kutz could command. They had warlike traditions, but the Aztec empire had for nearly three centuries done all the fighting in Mexico. They had great skill with the bow, but the other weapons, the spear and axe and maquahuittl they had used only in their war games, practice bouts—few of them had acquired the knack of splitting a skull. The chiefs of Chetumal had but a rudimentary conception

of battle tactics, and all my suggestions in this line they welcomed with wide-eyed enthusiasm. It never occurred to them I had not thought it up upon the moment.

I intended to use their skill with the bow to the utmost. I knew they would have done better if a hammer and chisel had been useful in battle, for their skill with these was phenomenal—they spent most of their time, when not engaged in work in the fields, carving and sculpturing their glyphs and decorations on the walls of their city. Every square inch was covered with some kind of decoration.

I knew Cortez' tremendous success with the conquest had been solely due to this ineptitude for war which was a result of centuries of an attitude toward war not understandable by a European. Even the war-like Aztecs regarded war as a kind of ceremonial necessity, a way of acquiring captives for sacrifice upon their numerous and steadily streaming altars—rather than as a means to a practical end. But then, the Crusades had been entered into from such a motivation . . . Well, I had a Crusade of my own to attend to . . . You can't use a skill with hammer and chisel on the heads of cavalry or helmeted infantry. I intended to use trickery.

I took to the trees about a half mile from the Spanish position. My Indians have a method of traveling over the numerous jungle swamps. They take several long poles into the tree tops, slide them along from tree to tree and lash them to the limbs. Then the pole at one end is passed along, lashed to the front end again—and the party proceeds dry foot across quagmires. This method I used now to approach the Spanish unseen.

I looked down on the camp of the enemy. I made a swift estimate of

their number, some twelve hundred in all, with perhaps three hundred horses. It was a larger expedition than I had expected—perhaps Ah Kin Kutz had been tortured and had revealed the wealth and numbers of Chetumal—likewise that, unlike many Mayan tribes, they were willing to fight if someone asked for it.

We ran our overhead pole line right up to the edge of the trees lining the banks of the dry stream bed. I hung there, thinking, looking, watching the Spanish prepare camp, light fires, spread their blankets. With them were several thousand natives of Tabasco! This I had not counted on. Likewise I learned that Cortez himself was present, which I had not known before. I could not hope to battle with such numbers, not with the redoubtable Conqueror himself at the head—but I could and would harass and drive him off.

If I had known that at that same time he was marching to extend the Spanish Empire, plotters were preparing to seize his goods and wealth and to completely supercede him in Mexico, it would not have changed my plans. Whatever happened to him he deserved, to my mind. He was too fond of burning enemy caciques at the stake.

Cortez had been driven back from Tenochtitlan by Guatimozin, until he had gotten a chance at them on an open plain. Then his cavalry and cannon had won him speedy and complete victory. That wasn't going to happen to me. I had reasons for wanting to be a somebody myself. Not the burning ambition that drove Cortez toward Empire, perhaps, but a dream of—Osana, and her smile—so oddly wise and gently alluring in the firelight—of a gentle, simple people looking up to me for the rest of my life as their saviour—a dream of a different kind than animated these mercenaries of Charles the

Fifth.

The Tabascan warriors worried me more than the Spaniards. They could follow us where the Spaniards could not. Could I use their stupidity to fool Cortez' keen mind into some blunder? I did a series of mental somersaults figuring how to get rid of that armed might camping so peacefully in the wide graveled bottom of the dry water-course. Out of sight up and down stream stretched the lights of the fires. Darkness was now nearly complete.

THE sun withdrew its last blood-colored ray from the sky, and the blackness settled down. I hoped the gloomy feeling I had was one presaging the Spanish doom. But I was like a monkey looking at chestnuts in the fire. How to get them out? Surely not with my unwarlike Chetumals. I looked about at their intent, fiercely painted faces, felt reassured. They would fight, bravely and hard. We would have to do what all the might of Montezuma's empire had failed to do. But Montezuma had no Spaniard running his army. Osana's father had—'Zalo Guerrero.

When Cortez had bested the Montezuma, he had also had the hardy Tlascalans. Now he had some two or three thousand Tabascans—which is a very different thing. My own Chetumals were far superior to the Tabascans, who had had the spirit taken out of them by Spanish rule. The Tlascalans fought the Aztecs from pure hate. The Tabascans were fighting merely to placate their Spanish overlords, if I knew anything.

But a half dozen sentinels guarded the camp, and perhaps that many more up the stream bed out of my sight. I intended to show a half dozen of the brawnier of my warriors just how they could be taken care of silently by doing

the first two myself. Once shown, these boys did not forget. I realized their serious attitude by the profound silence with which they listened and watched the camp.

I went back along the high route through the trees, dropped to the ground among my main force. I gave my orders to the chiefs.

"Close in gradually until discovered. If an alarm is given, attack swiftly, kill as many as you can before resistance arises. As soon as their surprise gives way to an attempt to resist, as soon as they get together and begin to really fight, get away—fast. We will take the same route back, as soon as we are well away, we will take to the trees across the Black Swamp. Poles are piled along the paths to the swamp, there will be no delay in taking to the trees. They will not even know where we have gone, unless the Tabascans guess, and tell them. Even so, they will have to cut poles and we will have plenty of time. Kill! Kill swiftly, and many!"

I turned away. It was up to the Chetumal clan chiefs to see that the orders were carried out. We were up against such numbers here that if we got embroiled in a general battle we were doomed. I suspected their numbers were half again as great.

I took my own band with which I had wiped out Montez, started off under the trees toward the foot of the camp where the horses were. Without them the Spaniards were not a great deal better than Indians except at close infighting. There, their skill with their swords always had proved decisive. For, when Maya youth is learning to cut stone and inscribe glyphs of great complexity upon hard rock—a Spaniard is learning the rapier and to carve his mark upon another's chest. It makes a great difference in a man, raised to

the ways of war—or of stone-cutting.

We would see just how great this difference was.

With a dozen of my brawniest I crept silently toward the sentries at the horse corral. The horses were not hobbled, they had strung leather ropes from bush to tree to stake, marking off a rough circle at the edge of the stony river bed, where there was a strip of grass for grazing. Two sentries lay at full length by a small fire, another paced slowly around the rope enclosure. I slid forward under the brush till he passed directly by me, and then I called upon Itzamma, the moon-god, who is powerful at night, to help me, as I slipped out a wide bladed obsidian knife from my belt, and leaped high upon his back. My arm went around his face, covering his mouth, my blade went under his chin, my weight pulled him backward upon me. As we struck the ground my rough saw-edged blade had worked clear across his throat in one tugging stroke and had gone back for another trip. He whipped his body around, thrashed furiously in a reflex attempt to gain his feet—and died, covering me with blood from his gaping throat. I got up, beckoned to my watching huskies, saying as they slipped to my side—"That is how it is done. Now we do the same to the sleepers at fire, open the corral, and drive the horses gently, with as little noise as possible—toward the forest. Once in the forest, start slapping the horses with limbs of trees, but do not shout. They will run off into the dark—or they will not. I don't know too much about horses myself. But go ahead . . ."

The Chetumals I had selected for the job had learned a thorough lesson. They pounced simultaneously upon the sleeping men at the fire, they died without crying out. Everything was going well—I hoped.

Everything was going well till from the other end of the camp someone shot off a matchlock at a creeping shadow. The stricken Indian screamed and the camp was aroused. The Spaniards rose from about their fires, scrambling for their swords and armor. My Indians now proved their heritage, or my wise words of counsel—for they raced into the camp howling and screaming and clubbing every enemy head in sight. It was a thorough scuffle, the firearms of the Spanish did not worry me, they were a slow weapon of little use in a hand-to-hand fight in the flickering light, but the Spanish swords were also flickering in the firelight, and they were red with Chetumal blood. I did not like it, we drove in among the remaining horses, with shouts and slaps on the flanks with maquahuitls drove them racing madly ahead of us, some through the raging camp where some six thousand men were madly trying to skewer, club, knife or throttle each other.

LIKE a flying wedge my two hundred drove through the press, for I had trained them in the ancient method used by Alexander with such success. I had not had time to train the huge regular army in this way, but only my own two hundred, and our united front of rising and falling maquahuitls and axes, under which plied the short stabbing spears, was as much a surprise to my own Chetumals as to the Spanish and Tabascans. Tramping out the camp fires as we passed, we swept over three Spanish musketeers trying to get a brass carronade into action. Picking up a brand from the fire I thrust a short fuse into the keg of gunpowder by the brass cannon—lit it, racing on with the explosion behind us lighting up the whole crazy scene.

I had no intention of being caught

in mass formation by the fire of these cannons, of which they were several, and as my flying wedge reached the edge of the camp we swept on into the darkness and back along the trail by which the Spanish had come to the spot. It was well marked with trampled brush and grass from the thousands of feet that had passed in column, and under a thin crescent moon we raced on toward the edges of the black swamp which the trail circled. As we ran the warriors gave loud owl cries, the agreed signal for retreat. I was not taking any chances. I was a thorough believer in the old saw—"he who fights and runs away". I wanted these men to live till tomorrow night, when we could repeat the raid.

When we had covered about half the distance to the swamp, I called a halt. We had rehearsed this part of the plan carefully many times, and my two hundred, of whom I had lost but a half dozen, now stepped into the black wall of leaves that always borders these jungle trails. All on one side of the trail, I could hear arrows rustling from the quivers, the soft nick of string fitting the nock, of bows being stretched in anticipation.

The rest of the Chetumals streamed by, as they passed I counted apprehensively, flinched at the number who hurried by holding hands to some streaming wound in breast or belly. But they were in good order, and orders were being carried out faithfully. Malinche had also received some wounds this night, if not in his body, at least in his reputation.

As a sub-chief hurried by at the head of his men, I hissed to him, he dropped out, came directly to me by sound. I said—

"Get the wounded into the trees, and the ladder poles erected for us. Get poles erected along the trail where it

skirts the swamp high up, and post your men there to cover our retreat."

After the last of my Chetumals had passed, and I had quietly commended the souls of the missing to their own brand of Heaven, we settled down to wait. The moon skirted a great grey and black cloud like a galleon of gold upon a sea of mystery, the night birds called their eerie cries, a jaguar screamed, the jungle went on its way again oblivious of man and his struggles. We waited, and at last heard the shuffle of moccasins, the hard breathing of quietly running warriors, a foreguard of Tabascans swept by, some three hundred of them, their ranks ill disciplined, their eyes frightened and wary, rolling in their heads as they tried to watch everywhere at once—they knew what they were apt to run into but they had to obey the Spanish orders. Then came what I waited for, a score of Spanish, who had managed to catch horses and ride in pursuit. My line of two hundred stretched a long way along that black trail, there was just sufficient light to shoot by, and these targets were close; we were not twenty feet off the trail. Six feet apart, we had stretched out, along one side of the trail. As the mounted troop clattered by, harness jingling softly, muted curses called upon the "damned savages" came delightfully to my ears. As they reached the center of our line, I gave the cry of the Quetzal bird, the signal for attack. Two hundred bows twanged as one, and each of the score of horsemen cried out, and half of them fell instantly dead, for we could not miss, and there were ten arrows directed at each man. Some fell with a score of arrows projecting from them, but the half remaining reared their horses in a spin, and started back. Again the bows twanged, and this time there was a score of arrows for each target. They

dropped, how could they have done otherwise?

MY MEN now made me very proud, there were no murmurs that it was time to leave, there was only a grim silence, a waiting from that invisible line of archers. My purposes and plans were becoming clear to them, they understood now that the Spaniards gave no quarter, and none could be given them. The grim seriousness of what we had to do to remain free of these invaders was becoming apparent to them, I felt, and the errors of the ways of the Indians which had caused their general defeat at Spanish hands were being shown them by demonstration. Things would be different in this area of Yucatan from now on, I knew. I had accomplished much already. The Chetumals would never give up, now.

A horse is not easily killed by arrow fire—and a dozen of the mounts of the Spanish had stampeded, riderless, along the back trail. Arrows protruded from their flanks and bellies, they pounded, maddened by their wounds, off into the night. I knew they would bring more troops from the camp—to the aid of their comrades.

The fallen, many of them still alive though dying, littered the trail. We stepped from our concealment, crushed the skulls of the still living with axe blows. The bodies we left where they had fallen. They formed a focal point about which I knew the next passers would stop, to discuss the manner of their death and to examine their wounds. I hoped that Cortez himself would come now that he had time to reflect that this was no ordinary enemy who had so disrupted his plans.

But we reckoned without Cortez' keen discernment. He knew better than to venture anything in the darkness, and the very nature and success

of our attack must have taught him caution, for though we waited till dawn, nothing passed except a few wounded Tabascans struggling back toward their camp. These got no further, and their condition told me that the larger force waiting at the swamps edge had entrapped the Tabascans. As the first streaks of dawn lightened the sky, we gave up our grim vigil and made our way along the trail to the swamp.

Here we took to the trees again, scrambling up the long notched poles to the path of lashed poles across the black water. Making our way along the path, all traces of which we removed by unlashing the last pole and passing it on ahead, we made our way across the swamp and to the safety of the land beyond. Here we made camp and slept through the day.

Mid-afternoon, a scout came in and woke me, with the news that Malinche had broken camp and moved at noon—away from Chetumal. I detailed a dozen men to follow their route and mark the site of their next camp. I was not through with Cortez. I wanted him and all Spaniards to fear the land around Chetumal so greatly that none would set foot there.

Evidently he had waited all the morning for his force sent on our trail. When none came, he had drawn the inevitable conclusion and chosen discretion and flight as the only answer to the enigma.

Cortez had pushed that crew of men that afternoon. It took us the better part of the night to reach their new position, unburdened though we were with baggage and cannon and armor as was the enemy. One cannot travel as fast in the night, even though we knew the country intimately and Cortez only by the use of his Tabascans—or perhaps some of his scouts were impressed from Ah Kin Cutz' Zamancanans.

Cortez had chosen this camp with greater care. On the edge of a great grass plain, with no cover anywhere but the knee high grass—his remaining horses were not corralled, but were tied close in by the fires—and the fires were big and numerous. Sentries paced the rims of the camp at six foot intervals, burning matches in their hands, heavy bell-mouthed muskets in the other. Inside this pacing ring of Spanish sentries, a second ring of Indian sentries stood leaning on their spears, quivers loaded with arrows and strung bows on their backs. The set-up looked as formidable as a camp in the open could.

BUT Cortez had overlooked one possibility. The grass did not look like much for cover, but it was near knee high, and dry enough to burn. It was the only loophole I could see in his defense. His over-confidence resulting from his previous vast successes must have made him somewhat blind to overlook this obvious method of attack.

Among the spoils we had collected from the Spaniards we had killed were powder horns and boxes, each partially filled with powder. We had over a hundred in all from our two encounters. I saw a use for this powder, worthless to me as my Chetumals would have nothing to do with the guns it was designed to load.

Under the cover of the dark, and at a safe distance I personally laid a fine powder trail completely around the camp site. Thin as I had to spread the powder, there was yet enough for the purpose. Far off in the shielding forest, a fire was lit, and burning embers brought out to me in a cup. With a prayer I dropped the embers upon the powder trail and raced back to my forest.

What I had done was something no

Indian would have dared to do. There were more taboos against the use of fire than a man could remember with three heads. No Indian would ever set either grass or forest afire, for a forest fire was to them a terror greater than any man could conjure. Fire was a curse of the gods, when it was loose in the forest, fire was something only handled with prayers and vast misgivings and charms against its evil power. Yet my Chetumals worked with me in this because they thought of me and the Spaniards as Children of the Gods and it was only natural we should employ such forbidden weapons, since they were weapons reserved to the Gods alone.

Looking back, I saw the fire race along the circle, and the cries of the fearful Tabascans weird and forboding in the suddenly-lit night.

There were few Spanish cries, but as the flames leaped higher and higher, a concerted effort to beat out and stifle a section of the ring of fire to provide a means of escape for them all. My Chetumals needed but two words now to know what to do—"Kill!" And "Kill" again.

Running at top speed toward the Spanish firefighters were a thousand bowmen, and the eyes of the Spanish were blinded by the fire in their faces, our own were clear and ourselves clear of danger, racing along the smouldering path where the fire had passed.

Our arrows poured in a withering stream among the Spanish and Tabascans trying to stamp and beat out the fire, they dropped the cloaks and blankets they were flailing upon the fire, some came bounding across the flames toward us with naked blades in their hands, others seized their muskets and fired into the dark. But they could not see us, and they were clear targets to us, especially when they leaped the flames and came at us, silhouetted

against the growing barrier of flame.

Under our concentrated fire they fell, those who still stood gave way and turned and ran back to the shrinking center of the ring of flame. Thirty feet high the flames swept on toward the crowding, confused mass of men and horses and shrieking Indians.

AGAIN Cortez turned to his brass cannon, and bellowing discharge after discharge ripped out upon us from the mass of men. Then happened what I had feared, my Chetumals quailed before the fierce slaughter of the occasional lucky burst that caught our too thickly grouped warriors, quailed before the unknown power of the thunder and lightning loosed upon us—and gave ground, turned and sought the safety of the forest. I could not blame them, I followed, running quite as hard as they—I had no wish to drive home our attack and close with those desperate fire-ringed men. My blood boiled at the lost opportunity, but the shock of their first taste of grapeshot and the noise of cannon was too great. Better to wait till they recovered.

There had been little need for the Spanish alarm and confusion, for when the fire reached the trampled portions of the brown grass it died down to a mere smouldering harmless flicker, easily stomped out with their boots. And the greater part of the camp area was trodden flat with the many feet.

We had accounted for perhaps two score Spaniards and twice as many Indians with our arrows, a very real damage to the Spanish. Since our first attack upon the invaders we had slain several hundred of the best Spanish troops, near as many of the hard-to-get horses, and a thousand or more of the Indian allies whom Cortez had managed to delude into following his ban-

ners.

We had made the borders of Chetumal much too hot for Cortez, and I knew it would be many years before another Captain tried to invade our land after Cortez had failed.

WHEN we sought the Spaniards the next night-fall, they had put an even greater distance between themselves and these so-different Indians of Chetumal. Cortez, I knew very well from his precipitate flight, had decided that whoever or whatever had caused such spirit and cunning in the heretofore easily beaten natives, he wanted none of it.

I returned to Chetumal with my victorious "savages", married my Osana in great pomp, and when her father dies, there is every chance that the Chilians will approve me as the next King of Chetumal.

So, old priest, write it all out for my mother, carefully, so that she will know her son has done better by himself than all the Spanish Lords would ever have done for him had he remained loyal. The letter should ease her last days, to know that her son will be a King, for that could come to a sailor in but one way, in this New World. Now, when you have finished, my warriors will guard you to the border of our land, and you may tell the Spanish with whom you talk of Chetumal that so long as a Chetumal remembers me there will be but death to welcome them here in our land. We will remain savages, and they may remain Bearded Gods, so long as they also remain far, far, away from Chetumal and her forests.

Write down, old priest, that her son is a prince among men, and that Chetumal is his home forever, a home where dignity reigns and peace rules.

THE END

MANDARIN'S BLACK-MARKET

By A. GARRISON

SMUGGLING in our times is rotten business. It was the big crime in prohibition days, and offended most during the slave labor epidemic on the West coast. As a racket it has been pretty much beaten down by strong government action to smash the gangs before they get started.

But smuggling wasn't always that kind of game. There was a time when it served a different purpose. There was a time when it was a weapon against tyranny. Have you ever heard of Louis Mandarin? He was a Frenchman, born in the days when the masses of Frenchmen were being sucked dry of their meagre earnings by the vicious tax policy of their government. It was a neat game played by the monarch and the farmers-general in this way. The king needed money. Taxes were hard to enforce and harder to collect. Therefore, he farmed them out to men who agreed to guarantee a minimum for the King with the provision that whatever else they could squeeze out was their own. It was simple.

The farmers-general could and did tax everything. They taxed salt, tobacco, wine, candles, farm goods, farm leases, all manufacture, transport, sales and business deals. It was a privilege that one could sneeze and cough without expense.

It was in this world that Louis Mandarin grew up. He was not very old when he came to understand that of all the taxes his people hated, the salt tax was the worst, the hardest to bear. Since salt could be purchased only at government warehouses, the farmers-general could and did raise the price sky high. It soon became so preposterous that few could buy salt. But since this meant that salt sales would be too few in number, the farmers-general quickly had a decree issued whereby every man, woman, and child had to buy seven livres of salt every year—at the price the government decreed!

Into the resulting struggle Louis Mandarin threw his efforts. He was no patriot in the beginning. His early smuggling activities in tobacco had been only for personal gain. But when his brother was caught and executed, Mandarin vowed vengeance on the farmers-general.

SO HE began smuggling salt and all the other things the people needed into France, selling them at a profit to himself but still at a price below the government's price. He drew more and more men into his band and he grew more powerful his tactics became bolder. Soon his men hawked their wares in the street and the government's goods went begging.

But the farmers-general were not easily beaten. They hired increased numbers of agents to fight

Mandarin and his band. They met and fought but each time they were out-generalled.

With headquarters in Savoy and Switzerland, Mandarin organized his own private smuggler-army. He marched into France challenging and defeating all opposition. As he went from town to town, his soldiers never stole and never plundered.

Their best customer was the government itself. Mandarin's first call when entering a town was at the King's warehouse. To the warehouse officials he said, "I must have customers. You have interfered with my old ones by making it illegal to deal with me. Now here is some good tobacco—much better than yours, and also much cheaper. I sell it cheap, you know, because I don't pay any duty on it. You will purchase some, won't you?"

ON ONE occasion a rich landowner tried his hand at opposing the smuggler-king. He offered a thousand livres for Louis Mandarin's head. Mandarin came upon one of the posters announcing the offer and went straight to the landowner's castle.

"Here is my head," he said, "though I am afraid I cannot leave it with you." Then he claimed the prize money, and the landowner, fearing for his own head, paid up.

Mandarin's ventures into the interior soon took on the character of real military campaigns. The government responded finally by sending units of the regular French army to deal with this rascal.

While the French cavalry, under Lieutenant-Colonel Fischer, waited for him at the frontier, Mandarin slipped around him and attacked the town of Beaune. There was a fierce struggle but Mandarin won out. He "taxed" the Mayor of Beaune twenty thousand livres, delivered stolen tobacco equal to that amount, at the smuggler's rate of course, and raced out of town just as Fischer and his men came riding in.

BUT Fischer's tactics changed when he decided not to destroy Mandarin's whole band, but Mandarin alone. He rightly saw that it was Mandarin's genius which gave the band its power. Without him they could be easily dispersed. So the army officer hired five agents to work their way into Louis Mandarin's organization. Posing as deserters, the men went to Mandarin and he gladly took them into his depleted ranks. But on the first night, these men revealed Mandarin's hiding place and engineered his capture.

Louis Mandarin was tried and convicted by the French government. He was sentenced to be executed, and that sentence was carried out.



ONLY A SUCKER BITES

by J. C. Stanley

Tenhag was an outlaw and a killer, but even a bitter enemy like Arget, the king, had to recognize the courage of the clever, wily, old Northern Pike!

THERE were small weeds growing around the entrance, and a school of horned minnows swam up, peered inside into the murky darkness and swam past.

I didn't care. I was full of years and besides, I wasn't hungry. Far ahead, through the iridescent gleam of the water, I saw the stump, and smiled to myself. For I knew who lurked behind its twisted branches.

A small shadow came by and I moved quickly. The minnow tasted good. Yet I had swallowed him without any consciousness of desire. It was just that he had ventured too close. I was busy, concentrating on that patch

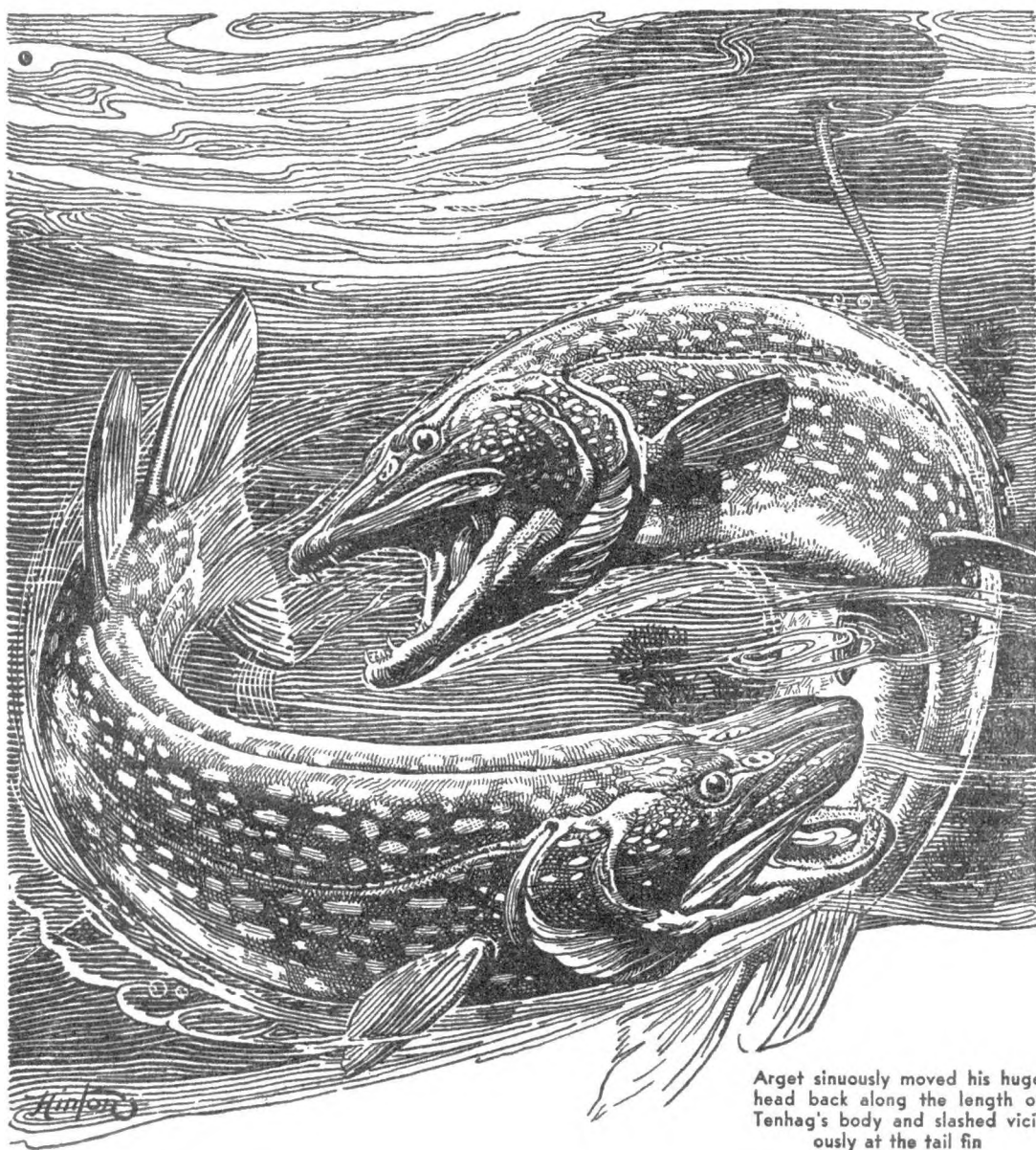
of gloom ahead out there near the center of the lake.

Then I saw them! There were eight or nine of them, fat, juicy sun-fish, swimming close to each other, the leader a bit ahead of the rest. I swam closer to the mouth of the cave. It happened with the quickness of death.

He was a streak of light, a lance of speckled fire eating into their midst. Silvery streaks parted the water as the small fish tried desperately to escape Tenhag. But only five got away. Tenhag had had his breakfast.

I came all the way to the lip of the cave.

Tenhag was a killer. The worst kind,



Arget sinuously moved his huge head back along the length of Tenhag's body and slashed viciously at the tail fin

the kind who killed for the sheer joy of killing. It was impossible that anyone could be that hungry. His ravening mouth seemed never to have its fill of food. Nor did he fight and kill the natural things which were food for him. Whatever came across his path was legitimate prey; yes, even the females of our tribe. That was why they had outlawed him. Yet I had to admire

those very qualities which the rest hated.

I swam close to him and saw him move to one side, the long muscles contracting in sudden tension, as he waited to see what large shadow was crossing his path. He saw me and waited.

I had to admit the size of him; I was smaller by half a foot, not so lean. But I was older, wiser, nor did my jaws bear

the scars of the hooks, nor my flanks and belly the scars of teeth. His had both. He followed, a head behind me.

"Where do you go?" he asked.

"To the wild celery weed," I said. "It is warm there, and soon the sun will be up. I know of a nest of ducklings . . ."

There was no need to say more. Food was the only thing on his mind. But there were other things on my mind. Age was with me, and the remembrance of things past. They stirred in me as I thought of the plump, Jerra, the one who swam by the side of Arget, the king.

We lurked, the two of us, in the wild celery weed. The sun came up. I felt the waters warm and saw the clearness grow above. It would not be long before the little furry food swam out . . .

ONCE more he swam beside me. And this time, even he was full. I headed back to the cave.

"Why is it," he asked, "that *you* come to me. I am an outlaw."

"And what is an outlaw?" I asked. "Once I was king. Now Arget is king . . . You know the law of the tribe. I was king and did not fight for my kingship. So now I live my years out in peace. But I do not like Arget . . ."

He lay deeper into the slime at the bottom. Yet though he said nothing, I knew my words had stirred him. He also hated Arget.

"But you can go back," he said. "Even though Arget is king. I have seen him swim beside you . . ."

I did not answer. The wheel I had started in revolving would not stop now until it had completed its circle.

When we awoke, the sun was high. Its light filtered down to where we lay. I stirred and the movement woke Tenhag. He seemed barely to move yet in an instant he was at the mouth of the cave. I saw his head swivel in search.

I joined him.

Wordlessly, he started out. His long, lean length cleaved the water and broke a path for me. He headed upstream, to where the perch collected in the afternoon, close to the logs near the inlet. But we had overslept. There were those others who came to search for food. We saw the wild swirl of waters before we reached the spot. Our cousins had beaten us to the perch. And though they were many to our two, they fled before us.

Tenhag raged in the water. He turned this way and that, his speckled body flashing silver streaks of light, as he twisted about, searching for even a single morsel. But there was not even one. They had fled.

I saw the long length of boat before Tenhag did. Calling a warning, I went for deep water. Nor did I turn to see if he followed. It wasn't till I was down in the weeds at the bottom that I turned to see where Tenhag was. What I saw made me shoot back up again. Whether he had snapped at the red-covered thing in anger or because he was hungry, I didn't know. But he had and it wasn't another fish he had taken.

I swam beside him, as he headed for the shore, and I saw the length of line in his mouth. He had taken the bait clean and deep. Whoever had hooked him had hooked him good. But they had never had such as Tenhag on their line. He was no wall-eye, or pickerel. He was a northern, and we are made of fighting stock.

The line trailed deep as Tenhag zoomed with terrific speed for shallow water. All the instincts which a hundred fights had given him were aroused. Suddenly, and with a movement that was like light, he turned his full length, and went straight down. But not for long. Whoever was at the end of the line was also a fighter. Tenhag was

pulled up sharp.

And now he went straight up. Not to stop at the water's edge, but to continue straight up in a wild leap. I saw his tail go out of the water, so high did he go. And when he came down it was straight down.

He went past me, whirled, and suddenly stopped moving. I wondered if he had gone crazy. And so must have the man above. But Tenhag must have weighed better than thirty pounds. And when the fisherman started to drag that dead weight up, it was more than a job. Tenhag let him drag him on until he had almost breasted the water again. And Tenhag made his move. It was the last thing the fisherman had thought, that a fish would come straight for the boat. For a bare instant the line went slack. And in that instant Tenhag whirled again and went in the opposite direction, with all the speed at his command. That did it. The line parted with a singing sound. And Tenhag was free.

But only from the man.

FOR now there was another enemy to face, and more than one. We had come too close to Arget's domain. And two of his clan had been attracted by the commotion of the fight and had swam close to see what it was about. The sight of Tenhag, the line still trailing from his jaws was too much for them. He was their sworn enemy, and wounded or otherwise, was fair game for them. They attacked instantly.

It should have been over in an instant. Tenhag still had the cruel hook in his jaw. He was at a great disadvantage. Yet he turned to give battle.

The first of his attackers, a giant of a warrior, was even larger than Tenhag, but younger, with less fighting experience. He came straight at him, and at the last second shot to one side to come

in from there. But he had come faster than his companion. And had arrived first. It was the only mistake he made. But it was also the last. Tenhag waited until the gaping jaws were spread only a foot from him before he moved. Then it was to face the other. The great teeth closed along the side of the attacker's head and ripped along the jaw, taking away one eye and the part of the neck. And Tenhag whirled on the second.

The second was older, wiser, and a better fighter. He moved in a slow circle around Tenhag, watching and waiting the chance to bore in. He wasn't going to make the same mistake the first made. The two circled for a very short time. Tenhag was the first to attack. Straight in, then down and from the bottom up. But the other wasn't to be taken in so easily. As swift as Tenhag, he whirled and ripped downward, their teeth clashing as they met. And again the circling and watching. Once the other made a feint to bore in and Tenhag tensed to meet the charge. But it was only a feint. And once again it was Tenhag who came forward.

This time he came in from the side. But just as he reached the other, he stopped, started downward. And the other whirled again to meet the new thrust. Only now Tenhag stopped, stood almost straight up on his tail and came from above, trying to get the other at the joint of the neck.

It was a mistake on Tenhag's part. Either the fight with the man had taken more from him than he thought, or he had lost some of the speed necessary, but he was a little too slow.

At any rate, the other managed to get out of the way, and as Tenhag went by, the other came in from above.

It was then I moved. I was old and slow, but the other's back was to me. He never knew what hit him. My teeth

were still long and sharp. I needed only the first slash. He fell to the bottom, with slow, jerky movements.

We had to get out. There were others beside these two, I knew. We did not travel in schools as the lesser fish, but we were still where enemies lay thick about us. And this time when I turned tail and sped away, Tenhag followed swiftly.

We were in luck. Halfway to where I had found a hiding place, way down deep in the slime of the deepest part of the lake, we came across a pair of blue-gills. And we ate them.

Tenhag could not be still. He swam back and forth agitatedly, as though he were in torment.

"Some day," he said, and stopped.

"Yes . . . ?"

"I will meet Arget," Tenhag said. "I will meet him on my terms. May it be soon."

My friend had desires on the king-ship. Good! That suited me also. But there were one or two things first.

"And how will you know?" I asked.

He couldn't answer. I had the answer, though.

"You," I said, "are an outlaw. But I am free to come and go as I please. I will go back to the tribe. Who knows but that some day I will find the place where Arget can be found?"

I watched him swim away and knew that I had sowed the seeds deeply enough.

IT WAS as though I had never left.

Arget swam close, rubbed his side against mine, and swam away to where Jerra moved among the tall weeds. The others lay quiet or moved in search of food. I found a deep place and watched.

A pair of young ones made play. They swam swiftly about in simulated combat. The older fish paid small attention to them. They knew it was but

in preparation for their later years. A pike lives but to eat or fight.

But though there were many there, it is only when we go out into the waters away from our feeding grounds that we travel alone, none came near. I was an outcast, to be tolerated only. For I had run from combat.

I found a warm place and sank into it. I was asleep but for my eyes. They never left off watching Arget and the plump, Jerra. She was the finest female I had ever seen. A something stirred in me, a something which had not been stirred in a long time. I wanted her. But first Arget had to be taken care of.

The days went by slowly. Nothing much marred the serenity. We ate, slept and ate. Once there was a fight between Arget and another who rose to challenge him. We gathered around and watched. The one who fought was barely old enough to consider himself a fighter. It did not take Arget long. A half dozen lunges, a few slashes of the sharp teeth, and it was over.

And the days went by.

But though I was as the rest, I was not like them. For they did not know the passing of time. I did. What I had to do had to be done before mating time. Already the days of heat were drawing to a close. The sun no longer warmed the water as it did before.

We each had our favorite feeding spot. Arget's was near a clump of weeds almost in the center of the lake. It was here the bass came to feed on smaller fish. Arget was fond of bass.

One day I swam away, nor did anyone notice my passing. I had a rendezvous to make. Tenhag was there as if he had been waiting my coming. I swam in and rested. The huge length of his body went to and fro past me. At last I spoke:

"I have found many things."

"What is it that you have found?" he asked.

"Where our brothers feed . . . where they fight . . . and who goes where and with whom," I said.

"It is good to know," Tenhag said.

"Aye," I said. "For instance, in the bulrushes where the water is deepest near the shore, they go two by two, as though in fear. But Arget is the bravest. The bass lie close near the weeds and rocks by the bottom. He goes there alone."

"It is good to know," Tenhag said.

"Aye," I said. "Before the first streak of light comes to make shadows in the water, Arget finds his hunger appeased there . . ."

I waited a while and continued:

"He is a mighty eater. And he eats his fill. One cannot fight well on a full belly . . ."

"Full or otherwise . . ." Tenhag said.

But I broke in:

"The rest will never know how much he had eaten. They will only know that you are king, and that you fought him alone, for I will be among them."

"I do not like it," Tenhag said.

"Like it or not," I said. "You will never live to fight him alone except this way. You are an outlaw and can not challenge."

"I will fight them all, one by one," Tenhag said.

"You will have time for that later," I said. "First, Arget."

He had to agree.

The seeds I had sown were starting to ripen. Jerra would soon be mine.

"There is only one thing," Tenhag stopped me as I started back.

"Yes?"

"Where the bass feed deepest is where our brothers travel most," he said. "For in order to go to the east shore they must go across the center of

the lake."

I had forgotten.

I THOUGHT quickly. There had to be a way out. But where? I knew their habits. It was true what Tenhag said. What was to be done? And the solution came; find them other feeding grounds. It wasn't as hard as it sounded. The lake was twenty or so miles across. I thought back in my memory. Where, in the long days gone by had I found food? Because we fed until there was no more, feeding grounds did not last too long. Soon, the smaller ones became frightened off, or learned to be more wary.

Once, in the years ago, I had found a school of horn-headed minnows in where we most disliked to go, shallow water. I kept the secret to myself. But I was younger then, more voracious, and soon they had made for other waters. Perhaps . . .?

But I was in luck. They had come back.

The tribe had grown more irritable. The younger fish had grown. Soon they would seek mates, would have fights which were more than just the play of their youth. One of them snapped at me as I passed. I gave it a wider berth and continued to where some of the oldsters lay.

"It is good to be old," I said to one. "When one is young, food is gulped quickly, as though there isn't going to be enough. Now we can pick and choose. Even go afield in search of delicacies. Like the horned minnow."

"The horned minnow?" he said. "I haven't seen one of those in a while."

I told him where he could find them. Another heard and swam close. I told him also. I knew the rest would hear of it soon. And once more I left.

I did not go far. The depths are full of places where one could stay and

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hide . . . and watch.

Early the next morning, a while before the sun came up, they swam out toward the feeding grounds. I watched them skirt the edge of the lake away from where Arget had his favorite feeding. I did not wait to see the last of them off. I had never swam so fast, not since I had run from Arget.

But Tenhag was not in his hole. I had forgotten that he was always hungry. The lake was large. It could take me a whole day to find him. It would have to wait. I had waited a long time. Another day would make little difference.

This time I made sure I'd find him. I came as it turned dark. But he wasn't there. I waited all the night, but he didn't return. Early the next morning I started out in search of him. One by one I visited the places where food was to be found. I missed only the minnow feeding grounds.

I found him. But it was a sore and wounded Tenhag that I found. He had had a fight with another. Inwardly, I raged at him. He had set my plans back, if not made them impossible. He needed rest. To fight Arget he would have to be in the best of condition.

"I could not help it," he said. "There was this school of bass. I plunged in, and from the other side came another. We met and fought. I won but he was a good opponent."

That was fine, I thought. He was a good opponent.

"But Arget," I said. "We haven't much time."

"Tomorrow," he said. "I will meet him."

"Not the way you are," I said. "Tomorrow, we meet him."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"You are in no condition to meet him, wounded as you are. He will make minnow bait of you."

It was the wrong note. I realised it the instant I said it, and almost at the same time made amends:

"... And that, Tenhag, will do you no good. Everyone knows you are the bravest pike in the lake. But even the bravest pike must use his head when the odds are against him."

"You mean we will both go to meet him?" Tenhag asked.

I thought I had made it clear. But I answered, "Yes," anyway.

"Very well. But I do not want you to interfere unless he is in much better condition than I," Tenhag said.

I agreed.

WE WERE just in time. Another moment and we would have missed him. He swam away from the weed-grown hiding place of the bass, a long, lean, muscular length of destruction.

He was swimming lazily, but at sight of the two of us, a change came over him. He knew without being challenged that this was a great moment in his life. Tenhag hated him; Arget was the cause of his being made an outlaw, and when he saw the two of us, he knew we had come for the one purpose of killing him. But fear was not in him.

"A challenge, Arget!" Tenhag cried. "For the kingship."

"I do not fight outlaws," Arget said.

"But I fight kings," Tenhag said, and made his first dive.

I swam quickly away from them, and moved back and forth, watching them and waiting for the moment which I knew had to come, the moment Arget would come too close to me.

It didn't seem possible that Tenhag stood any chance. Arget was in the prime of his life, and though his body bore many honorable scars of combat, he at least was fresh. Tenhag was not.

Arget, wise fighter, waited for Ten-



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hag. He wanted to see the method of the other's attack. But it was impossible to gauge correctly, either the caliber or method of a fighter like Tenhag. Firstly, Tenhag had always bought life dearly, and improvised as he fought; secondly and last, Tenhag was not like any other opponent. He never gave up, though he was wounded unto death.

Tenhag dove in a frontal attack. Arget let him come in and did not move away. He wanted the first slash of his teeth to be the last. But Tenhag also wanted the same thing. Their teeth met and their jaws almost locked; if they had the fight would have been over for the both of them that instant. But somehow they managed to disengage their mouths. Blood was scored by both.

They circled warily for a while, and again it was Tenhag who attacked. He started as though he were going to continue the circle, then came in from the side. Arget almost bent double and slashed at the other as he went by, but in turn felt Tenhag's razor-sharp teeth also. It was only flesh wounds they both inflicted.

The next blow was given by Arget.

He came in from below, and as Tenhag turned to meet him, Arget sinuously moved his huge head back along the length of Tenhag's body and slashed at the tail fin. Had he caught it properly, Tenhag would have been an easy prey. The tail fin is our method of maneuver.

Another fighter would have sent it out of harm's way. Not Tenhag. It was as though he felt what Arget desired of him. For instead, he slapped powerfully at the gaping jaws and knocked Arget sideways. It was as though he knew that Arget had wanted him to turn the fin away. Because if he had, Arget would simply have continued the dive and caught it.

Tenhag gave the other no chance to recover. He was instantly on Arget,

his jaws wide open, ready to slash or envelope. And Arget used discretion. It was then I saw where Tenhag, unless he made quick work, would lose out. Arget was much the swifter swimmer.

Arget made for the weeds and rocks. It seemed as if a thousand smaller fish hid there. They erupted from the weed-grown grotto, as if the devil of all fishes were after them.

Tenhag followed, and I after the two.

But Arget made a mistake in choosing the grotto, though he knew it well. For Tenhag had lived for a long time in such surroundings, and could play hide and seek as well, if not better, than the other.

I could not follow the play of their fight too well. The weeds grew thick, and the rocks would hide their swiftly moving bodies now and then. Once I saw them! they seemed joined, so close were they pressed, and they were tearing at each other in wild frenzy. But I also saw in that instant, that they were not inflicting the kinds of wounds from which they would die. It was as if they only wanted to tear each other to bits. Then they were gone from view again.

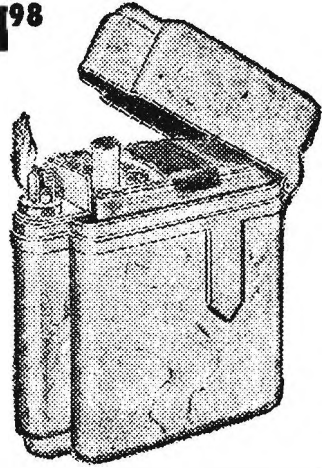
Quite suddenly, they came out of the grotto, Arget in the lead. The other was almost on his tail. And I saw that Tenhag had done much better than Arget. Blood came from a dozen wounds on the king's body.

Either Arget had grown tired during combat or he had eaten too much or his wounds were beginning to slow him down, but he was not so swift. On the other hand, Tenhag seemed to have gained speed. He was only half a length behind the other.

AND in a hundred feet, he caught Arget. Though he didn't catch him as he wished, from behind. Arget turned at the last second and the battle

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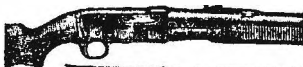
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was on again. Arget fought with desperation born of despair.

Once more they met head on. Arget gave up his power tactics. He used the method of slash and get away. And for the first time, it began to pay. For now Tenhag became tired. It seemed as if he couldn't quite manage to get away fast enough to escape. Arget's teeth left more and more scars. Yet as often as they met in the tough hide of Tenhag, they somehow always just missed a vital spot. And now Tenhag was running from the other.

It was not a straight run. He swam first straight-away, then from side to side, and again doubled on his self. And always, half a length behind, Arget trailed, desperately trying for the death bite.

It was only when they entered the grotto again, that I *knew* Tenhag's intention. He had led Arget to believe that he was wounded so badly he was only trying to escape. And Arget had fallen for the ruse. Tenhag had done his best work in the grotto. Now he was back among the weeds and rocks.

I was a few seconds behind them.

Now the fight raged with increasing terribleness. Tenhag was done with subterfuge. It was as if he realized that it was to be now or never. He attacked, and as many times as he was repulsed, he came back until by the sheer power and will of him, Arget was brought to bay, helpless.

I saw the lean sides, blood-covered, of the king, heave, as moved back and forth in rhythmic movement, his large eye watching every move of Tenhag.

Now Tenhag took care. It was going to be a single last lunge and . . . death!

Yet Arget was not done. He had his last reserves to call on, though they were limited. For as Tenhag swept in, Arget swam backward into an opening

behind him. Tenhag did not care. He followed. I did not want to miss a single second of the battle, and moved slowly behind them.

Once more they were together and now there was no room for maneuvering. The grotto was at its narrowest. In fact it was almost too tight a squeeze for Tenhag. He could only come straight forward. But Arget was half a length smaller, and the difference almost proved Tenhag's undoing. Though Arget was wounded badly, he had a last strength to call on.

Three times Arget whirled and dove in and each time Tenhag could not fend off the great teeth. The last time Arget struck it was at a vulnerable point, the juncture of the throat to the head. Another inch and the fight would have ended. Tenhag barely escaped, though Arget tore a great piece of flesh out. And this time it was Tenhag who used discretion. He backed out of the grotto.

The instant he came out he whirled and came toward open water. Arget could do nothing else but follow. I could have touched Tenhag as he came by me. As it was, the desperation in his eyes was plain to be seen. It was time for my move. For Arget followed the other in a straight line.

It was time, but I didn't move.

For as I turned with them I saw something for which I had not taken into account. The savagery of the fight had attracted not alone the curious of our world, the pan fish and minnows, but also the larger ones, Arget's tribe. All around us they swam idly, their eyes intent on the battle.

A single move toward Arget would have meant my death.

It was up to Tenhag now. He had to prevail over the king. But it looked like he was through. Arget was on him. They were side by side, and Tenhag turned his head inward, trying for a

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last slashing bite. But it was an old trick, well-known to Arget, who simply moved his own head, and came in and up. It should have been the end.

And it was, for Arget.

HE HAD come in and around, his head twisting to get under Tenhag so that he could get the soft underside of the throat. Arget's jaws were wide. And as he twisted his head, the trailing line which Tenhag had ripped from the fisherman's pole, twined itself in some manner around Arget's jaw. He yanked savagely at it, trying to free himself. But all he succeeded in doing was bring the other's teeth closer. Tenhag made one last snap, and in the proper place. Blood spouted from Arget's throat, and he began the last twisting roll toward the bottom of the lake.

Tenhag was now king!

Outcast though he was, it was still the rule of the tribe. He had fought the king in fair combat and won. Slowly, the rest joined him as he swam for the tribal grounds. And beside him, Jerra, plumper than ever, more desirable, swam beside him. I moved alongside, rubbed sides with Tenhag, and said:

"One favor, king. The female Jerra."

But I had forgotten that Tenhag had been without a female for a long time. And Jerra was the loveliest of them all. He flicked me contemptuously with his tail. It was Arget all over again. I had gained nothing!

I swam away, my blood boiling. A dace-headed minnow floated by and I snapped savagely at it.

It eluded me at the first snap but I tried again and caught it.

It wasn't till the hook sank deep into my jaw that I knew the minnow wasn't alive. . . .

THE END

SEA RAIDERS

By CHARLES RECOUR

A SAILOR'S life is a life packed with adventure, action, and more adventure. It is never dull, and never routine, it has a thrill a minute, and maybe even more, and it is not a profession that is a new one. It has been since the beginning of time, and will continue to be one as long as there is an ocean and sea and lake that is navigable, and even then, should it not be navigable, there will always be one of those sailors who will want to try and outwit the sea just once more. And always, the sailor's life will be packed with adventure.

This has been so ever since the days when sailing meant just that—by sail. And in those days the high seas were filled with raiders. In fact, the days of sail were the golden days for these sea raiders. Now such raids are not only impossible but are foolhardy. With the sleek submarine, the turbine-driven cruiser, and the streamlined bomber from above, commerce destruction by surface craft has not only lost its romance and its effectiveness, but the whole business of naval war commercially has been altered considerably. The most valuable weapon for the raider is his effective surprise on his victim, and this principal weapon has been rendered almost impossible to use since rapid means of communication, as well as the enormous range of a nation's scouting plane, have come into being. It is next to impossible for an enemy to conceal his weapons, even if he is under the water's surface.

The raider has ceased to be the chief reliance of a navy at war, and is now nothing more than a mere auxiliary to other means of assailing the enemy's commercial shipping. It has become secondary to under water vessels and to the air-planes. The surface raider is a vanishing phase of war at sea. As far as modern wars go, the efforts, the deeds or the worth of the men who manned the surface raiders did nothing to turn the tide of war. But they certainly did create a tradition of daring, dash and decent conduct, which is something that will not be forgotten for years to come. This tradition, always spiced with adventure, will live in our minds as long as our navy will. This is a heritage for those who follow the call from the navy, but who will answer this same calling in a different craft than the kind that their predecessors did.

THE stories and the brave deeds that the seamen wrote in the pages of our nation's history during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not to mention the innumerable pages they added to the histories of other countries, when they went out alone to meet the foe in their tall ships, are definitely tales filled with excitement, but they are essentially the same stories which were spun about the raiders who went out to sail under canvas.

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BY GROUCHO MARX

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And how are you going to send that kid of yours to college, without the folding stuff?

Maybe you think he can work his way through by playing the flute.

If so, you're crazy. (Only three students have ever worked their way through college by playing the flute. And they had to stop eating for four years.)

And how are you going to do that world-traveling you've always wanted to do? Maybe you think you can stoke your way across, or scrub decks. Well, that's no good. I've tried it. It interferes with shipboard romances.

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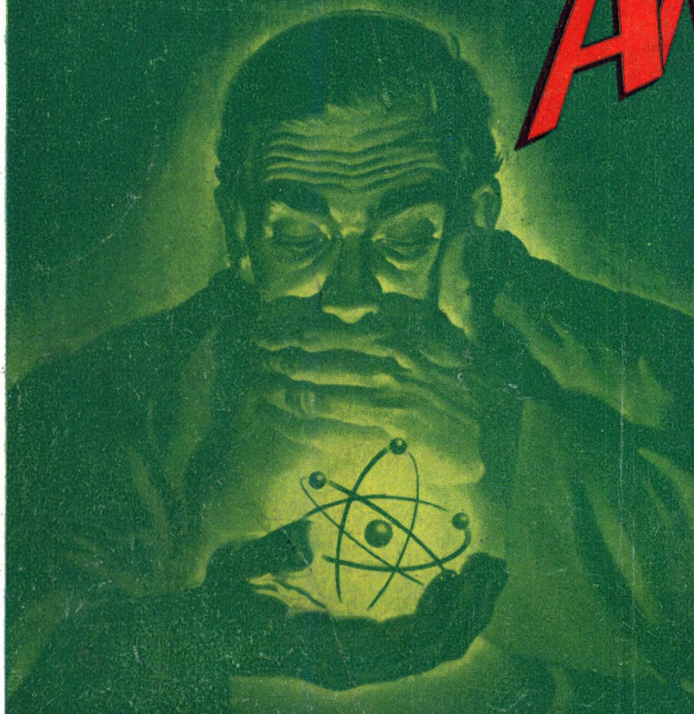
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